SQUA TRONT

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO EC COMICS

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GAINES
KURTZMAN

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CONTENTS

MORE SURPRISED THAN ANYBODY ... An Interview with AL FELDSTEIN 3
OUR BOYS ... ALONE WITH MARILYN MONROE 10
THE EC FANZINES Part 5: A LEGEND IN ITS TIME by Ron Parker . 13
THE CAMERA PARTY by the EC gang 21
EARLY WOOD 26
THE EC WRITERS 34
CARL WESSLER: An EC Writer Revealed 37
THE WESSLER STORIES 39
SHORT CHANGED by Carl Wessler, illustrated by Johnny Craig 42
COVER IDEAS FROM THE WOOD FILE 45
THE SECRET EC LINE 51
LETTERS 54
A CONVERSATION WITH HARVEY KURTZMAN AND WILL ELDER . 66
A ROGUES GALLERY by the EC gang 80
A CONVERSATION WITH HARVEY KURTZMAN AND BILL GAINES 82
PAUL, THE HORROR COMICS, AND DR. WERTHAM by Robert Warshow 93

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MORE SURPRISED THAN ANYBODY...

AN INTERVIEW WITH

AL FELDSTEIN

I'm absolutely amazed at the analysis that you guys do for the notes for Russ Cochran's EC Library. It particularly amused me that you would say, for example, that a particular story reflected Bill Gaines's philosophy about something or other.

Children . . .

Children, or parents, or wives, or what-have-you. I guess if that were true it was really an unconscious thing on both our parts. Because Bill was reading a tremendous amount of material, gathering up springboards, and then we would get together every morning and he'd throw out some ideas, and we would start to talk. If anything, it reflected a kind of a *mutual* feeling, because Bill never foisted his feelings on me; "I want you to write this story." When the story worked and we both felt it as a plot, then I constructed the whole thing out, whole cloth. All we had was the basic idea and then I would have to break it down into, how many panels is it going to take, what kind of dialogue, and the captions and so on. I would write it, and that was the afternoon. [*Laughs.*] Later, I got an office upstairs so that I could write quietly, because there was always a tumult going on in the office downstairs.

"Terror Train" [VoH # 12] is one of your first great EC stories. It was one of the few stories you reprinted later on.

Well, this is when we were just feeling our oats, you know. We had come on to this thing of doing horror and scary stuff. Bill and I had remembered "The Witch's Tale" and "Lights Out" from radio—this is all old hat, I know—and we tried it out in the comics. I had written a couple for *Crime Patrol* and *War Against Crime*, and then we decided to change titles, and I think that *The Vault of Horror* took over from *War Against Crime.*

Was "Terror Train" a favorite story of yours?

Oh, yeah. It's not the *best* one I've done—it was OK.

It's one of your most intense stories.

I'd have to read it over again, because frankly I don't remember it. I do remember that when they put out a movie called "Terror Train" recently I felt that it was a good title. [*Laughs.*]

It's a paranoid fantasy, really.

Yeah. Nightmare paranoid . . . well, I don't know what to say about it.

It interested me that you started out with stories of inner terror and gravitated to the EC style of a much more physical type of . . .

I'm not sure that I actually moved from anything, because I think that this was written about the same time as the inserts

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for *War Against Crime*, and I'm trying to remember what they were. There was "Ghost Ship" [CoT # *19*]. You'd have to look them up—and if you look them up, maybe you'll find that saying that I started with inner terrors and moved to outer terrors was not actually true.

"The Mummy's Curse" [WAC # 11], "Buried Alive" [WAC # 10].

OK. Now "The Mummy's Curse" was practically a swipe from the old mummy movie, and "Buried Alive" is kind of a . . .

Psychological . . .

Personal portrait thing, yeah. You know, I ought to leave all this analysis to you guys. It's fun to read, it's fun for you guys to do, and if you've got the insight, that's marvelous. We did these things just by the way we felt, and to now lie down on the couch of the analytical psychiatrist who's writing the notes for these books and say, "Well, I'm not sure if I had personal feelings about being locked in a coffin," or what, I mean . . . I wrote this as a first person woman—now how are you going to analyse that?

I don't want to analyse your personal input necessarily, but your professional approach to horror.

Let me off the top of my head give you my feelings about this. First of all, I was young and newly married, and I was trying to make a living. I had children, infants, and I was a free-lance comic book artist-writer, and I had to make a living. Now, what I had to do was to grind out the material, and really, this may disillusion a lot of people, but to me this was a *job*—this was another job to do. I wrote a story as well as I could. While I was writing it I tried to project myself into the story as the character would feel, whatever the plot was, and then I drew it as best I could in my particular kind of stiff, stylized style. And that was it! When I was finished with it, I got my check for $222.50, or whatever it was, and I went on to the next one, because I had to get the food on the table, you know, and pay for the car I was going to buy, and maybe someday own a house out on the Island, because I lived in a three-room apartment. So, really, my conscious drive was to make a buck. And if, in the process of making a buck, I turned out material that has become, quote, "classic," unquote, in the comic format, and has a great deal of nostalgic feeling about it, and people are now analysing it and everything, I scratch my head! I really can't help you on that level. I can't. I'm more surprised than anybody that the EC comics are collectors' items today.

I think a large part of that has to do with the fact that the horror comics tapped a certain adolescent chord; that at a certain age you're interested in the grotesque, and bad taste, and frowned-upon material—at about 14, 15. And that's why the horror comics were so popular.

I'll agree. We were in the right place at the right time in the right format for its time, just the same as immediately after that, when television became full blown, they got into all of that ersatz horror like the Hitchcock show . . .

"The Twilight Zone" . . .

Yeah, well, there was science fiction horror. They were a little scared of the horror, but they were going into that kind of thing on television. And the movies have been doing it *constantly*, and this latest wave of really Grand Guignol horror that's around now is tapping the same thing. It's just at different levels, you know.

Do you really think it's tapping the same thing? Although I think that at times EC went a bit too far, there was always a sort of a leavening, a distancing from the material that protected the reader in a way that the latest crop of films don't.

Oh yeah, there's no question about it. You can't compare the static panel-for-panel caption and balloon presentation of a comic with the actual full color *motion* picture with its sound effects and voices and spurting blood and everything like that. Sure.

But they're both going after the same thing that you're talking about in a youngster. His curiosity about his vulnerability, his fear of death and the fact that he'd like to see a little more about it so he can feel more comfortable with it. And I think that the extremes that they're taking in the motion pictures today only reflect the extremes in the *world* today that we face, the kinds of death that we face in the world today as opposed to the kinds of death we faced back when we were writing this in the fifties. There's more awareness of violence, and the great armament race has gone to such an extreme that we think about greater violence now than we did in those days. We thought about the fact that the United States had a couple of H-bombs, you know, and that nobody was going to fool around any more, and that this was it. Now, of course, it's progressed to a point where there's almost insanity in the world, and I think that the young people are appreciating a type of horror that reflects this insanity.

There are a lot of references to the bomb in the EC's.

Oh, sure. Well, it was a scary thing. Everybody was worried about it; and I was worried about it. It bothered me. The magnitude of it was new to us, and frightening. God, I remember when I was in the service on KP at the time that the news came of the dropping of the first bomb. And a week later the second bomb, and a week after that the war was over in Japan. I was out in Columbus, Ohio, and suddenly I was going to be a civilian again, and there was a kind of an elation. But at the same time I was very ambivalent about the whole thing. Here was this *terrible* terrible weapon . . . but I was out of the Army, thank God, and the war was over. But after I was a civilian and buckling down to civilian life and making a living I began to be concerned about it, that this thing was there and that the next war was going to be a different kind of war. If there was going to be a war it was going to be complete annihilation suddenly. That was the kind of thing that was in the back of my mind unconsciously—and consciously—when we referred to the bomb in our science fiction stories. It was because we had great concern about it.

But *primarily*—and that's why I want to leave the analysing to you people—*primarily*, while reflecting our personal feelings and maybe reflecting a lot of our unconscious feelings, these stories that Bill and I wrote were commercial ventures to produce a magazine that would entertain people and *sell*. To get to the nitty gritty of what we were feeling, or what our personal lives were like is something that's difficult for me to do, especially thirty years later.

I will say that it was very interesting that one of you recalled to me a feeling that I had when I was in service and stationed in Arkansas, in terms of the mid-west uneducated farmer philosophy that I had put into that story where the General eats the spaceship. That was very astute.

I'd like to discuss the early stories you illustrated yourself a bit more; for example, "Escape" [VoH # 16].

This was when we were getting into the little shock endings, you know, the twists, which of course became our "signature." I always loved twist endings and poetic justice, and guys who screwed other people and then got screwed by them, or screwed themselves. Even just glancing over it, I can see that that's what this one was all about, really.

I assume that the idea for the story came from another source.

Our plots came from a conglomeration of sources—movies we'd seen, books we'd read. I wasn't doing very much reading in those days. I was letting Bill give us the springboards, so I would be free in my mind to enter into the more original areas, if possible. Because we weren't really intending to steal stuff, we were just looking for inspiration to give us ideas to come up with something original. My function was to take the springboards out into a new area.

The art in your early stories is strangely fascinating.

Thank you for liking it. I never liked my art. I guess one of the reasons why I happily gave up artwork and moved on to writing and then editing is because I really never particularly cared for my art. And I was in no position at that point to go back to school and start unlearning what I was doing, which was very stylized. It worked pretty well on covers. But in the continuities, in order for me to move along and do a page a day, which would give me enough money to live on, you know. I had to move on . . . I had to bat it out is what I had to do! [*Laughs.*]

Your point about not reading the stories that Bill gave you the springboards from is usually obvious, because the EC story is so different in style . . .

Yes. That's why I said I was amused by some of these analyses about how the stories reflected Bill's feelings about something, because certainly some of the story was probably reflecting a lot of *my* personal feelings. But we worked well together, and we complemented each other. I'm not sure we had exactly the same philosophies, and I think that later on we diverged more and more as we developed our own personal lives with our wives and children. And we didn't exactly come from the same background either, but we were familiar with the same things, both being Brooklyn boys, and we were both fascinated by the same things. When we were working on the science fiction, we would spend *hours* on theory—on just developing the time loop stuff that we did, for example, to make sure that it worked exactly right, and that it was perfectly logical that this guy who went up on the bridge of the Titanic to stop the disaster was the guy who caused it. And if he hadn't been there in the first place, it wouldn't have happened. So he did a lot of no good, instead of good.

My favorite story in that line is certainly ". . .For Us the Living," where the fellow comes back to see Lincoln and is responsible for his death. It's a great switch on Bring the Jubilee, *in which the character goes back from* our *time and changes it into something else. In yours, he went back from* another *future and changed it into our time. Also, your story had such a hopeful one-world outlook.*

Well, we, I did a lot of idealizing [*in a disparaging tone*]. You know, I was a very idealistic person when I was young. Yeah, I believed that human beings could live in peace and tranquility together, and that there was enough in this world for everybody, and that it could be worked out. Since those days I've learned a lot about human nature, including my own, so I don't know what I would be writing if I were writing that kind of thing today, what my attitudes would be in the stories that you guys would be analysing in the future. I wonder whether an answer to that can be determined by analysing what's going into *Mad.* I think that even though I'm working in an entirely different kind of media, the humor and satire, I'm still projecting certain feelings about the world and about things that happen to me, and I'm beginning to wonder whether I've changed that much, if at all.

Going back to your comment about the springboards, that you hadn't read the stories in question, I would guess that that didn't apply in the case of Bradbury and Dark Carnival.

YEAH, JOHNNY! THEN THIS GUY TAKES HER BY THE THROAT AND RIPS HER HEAD OFF! YEAH, JOHNNY! AND THEN... GET THIS... SHE GRABS HIM...
... YEAH JOHNNY... SHE GRABS HIM AND RIPS HIS HEAD OFF AND IN THE LAST PANEL... GET THIS, JOHN... THEY'RE STANDIN' THERE... HEAD TO HEAD... AND... JOHN... JOHN?
ZZZZZZ
STORY CONFERENCE!

Are we talking about our own stories or the adaptations?

Before the adaptations there were quite a few borrowings.

Oh yeah, not only borrowings in terms of plot, but borrowings in terms of writing style. I was very impressed with Ray Bradbury. I read *Dark Carnival* and *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Illustrated Man,* and whatever else I could get ahold of of Bradbury's at the time. I was very impressed with his writing style and I tried to emulate it, I think, in the comic style. We didn't consciously steal from him, you know, but again, we might have been pretty close.

Actually, you did. In "What the Dog Dragged In" [VoH # 22] you changed the little boy to a young woman, but otherwise it's a very close adaptation of Bradbury's "The Emissary."

[*He reads through story.*] Sure looks that way, doesn't it? [*Laughs.*] Incidentally, the story just before that, "Gone . . . Fishing"—I got the idea for that while I was surfcasting, and I came to Bill with it, and said, "You always bring springboards, I've got a springboard," And he said, "Go write it." And I wrote it, and much later it was adapted into that short movie, which they did a pretty good job on.

I'm sure that "99 44/100% Pure Horror" [VoH # 23] is another purely original effort.

Tell me about it.

The villain makes someone into a cake of soap, and the soap gets back at him.

Oh, yeah, I remember that one now. He's in the shower and it plugs up the drain.

Is it possible that you started with the title and worked back to the story?

I don't know. I couldn't tell you if you were wrong or right, because you're asking me to remember something one day out of I don't know how many, thirty years ago. We might have had a discussion about the holocaust at the time, and turning people into soap. Maybe we came up with it on that level, who knows? We weren't going to do a holocaust story, but we could do something about soap. I really can't tell you.

Actually, there are several EC stories about doing something with people's body fat. One of your more horrific stories is "What's Cookin';" [HoF # 12], where in the end the fat villain is barbecuued and his fat-drippings are collected and used to deep-fry the other villain.

[*Laughs.*] Yeah, that was Bill and me, I guess.

You know, I haven't looked at these things in a long time. I find it interesting that when you ask me to try to recall a story, and I glance over it, there's *no way* that you can get what's going on in the story exactly, unless you start reading it. It's something that I've noticed, now that I'm away from it for so long. And I'm beginning to wonder, really, whether we were so successful in using the comic media illustration, or whether we were really more successful in the written word, and the pictures just went along for the ride. Because I'm looking at this and I would have to read the story to really find out—I can tell that a bar of soap does him in in the end, because that's pretty obvious from the pictures. But *why*, and how it got started, I have to read, because all I've got is a bunch of people talking to each other. That's kind of interesting. I remember discussions about my heavy captions and heavy balloons, and leaving little drawing space. But the drawing in that space, whether it was big or small, couldn't have told a story any more than it does, I can see, and that's an interesting thing. And yet I was first an artist. I *never* thought I was a writer when I was young. Certainly I was not that good in composition, or whatever, in school. And here I was moving out of the job of doing artwork and starting to write more, and concentrate more on the word. I guess I was rather impressed with Bradbury's writing and I was introducing that writing style into the comics. You know, it might have been an unconscious awareness that television was going to take away the visual end of it and we'd better at least give them the entertainment of the written word.

I'd like to ask about the Grim Fairy Tales. I think the first one is "A Grim Fairy Tale" [VoH # 27]. It's awfully grim!

[*He reads through story.*] Yeah, it is pretty grim. I wouldn't be too proud of this story. [*Laughs.*] It was formula. And the only possible saving grace is that it had a kind of observation of the unawareness of one class in dealing with the problems of others. That's about all I can say about it.

The Grim Fairy Tale went on to become a regular feature.

Yeah, and I'm trying to remember why. You know, it might have been that *I* went for them, because it was a chance to write a rather simple story with very light captions. And just doing a cutesy fast moving, fast reading thing. And that was always welcome in the kind of schedule we had.

Eventually you got to the point that you were doing a lot of kidding around, apologizing in footnotes for the puns, and so on. So it was very logical to do one of them in the first issue of Panic.

Hmm. You guys are terrific. You know, when you're working at a full blast on a schedule, you get into a kind of a pattern of creativity, if you can call it that, and I guess I just wasn't aware of what was going on. I was just interested in meeting the deadlines and grinding out the stuff, and getting away and going fishing on the weekend, or getting to my boat, which I finally bought after awhile.

But the tongue and cheek aspect that we're talking about was something that was always there. From the very beginning we *never* took ourselves seriously, and we really couldn't understand a guy like Wertham thinking we were serious.

One of the most important distancing aspects of your horror comics were the GhouLunatics, which I never cared for because they did seem to limit the books to that adolescent level that we were talking about. But they made it very clear to the readers what your attitude was, that humorous tongue-in-cheek.

I don't know whether it limited it in an age level, that may be true or not. Certainly "The Witch's Tale" on radio wasn't limiting to an age level—it used to be on at midnight. But in our case, I always felt that those GhouLunatics were saying, "We're going to have some fun with you, we're going to scare the pants off you, but remember, it's only a story. It has no bearing on truth, so come on, let's have some fun for awhile." That's really what I felt was the function of these guys when I first came up with the Crypt Keeper and the Vault Keeper, who were dead steals from the witch in "The Witch's Tale." I don't remember the witch being as facetious, and with the puns, but she cackled. I can remember listening to that show, creeping down the steps from my bedroom when the family thought I was in bed, and sitting on the steps while they were in the living room listening to the radio, and being scared stiff—and I was alone, too.

I've met people who read EC's when they were seven or eight who seemed as though they never recovered from the experience.

Gee, I hope we didn't hurt anybody. I know that people that we meet, certainly like yourself, that have hung in there and that have turned back to them are, I think, on a much higher level intellectually than . . .

I was always fascinated by the comment in one of your letter pages that said, in effect, "If we're hurting anyone, it's in a very subtle way, so subtle that we don't even realize it." I thought that was a really interesting sort of . . .*

Cop out.

No, an interesting qualifier, because I always felt that if there was any damage it was *done in a very subtle way, and in a way that was certainly totally different from anything that Wertham was talking about.*

What damage are we talking about, damage in terms of scaring the pants off these kids? So that it left a scar?

No, not at all. The horror comics were just so exciting to a young reader, that's the thing. They were so exciting *that nothing else in life ever seemed as exciting. I've met people who sounded as though they were sitting around like a vegetable for the last 25 years waiting for the EC reprint books.*

Well, gee [*laughs*], they can read Stephen King, and they can go on from there to much better stuff. But, you know, there's the other side of the coin. What about all the stuff that was in the stories that was positive in terms of at least moralizing, perhaps, where we showed that the world can be righteous if we allow it to be.

I have a theory that since the EC horror stories depend on a build-up to a planned crucial lapse of taste at the end, they could only succeed if the authors understood good taste and knew when they were violating it.

That's a very interesting analysis, John. I never really thought about it. I like the idea of the build-up to the sudden lapse of taste. It's like when you stick your finger into an electric light socket. You're OK until that minute when you touch it, and then it gives you the shock of your life, and so you back off real fast. And that's really what we did. We just gave them one shock to really scare them or to disgust them or to horrify them, or whatever. That was our gimmick, this work-up to the final denouement. It might be a lapse of taste. Or you could start analysing it on a sexual level—it might be a kind of parallel to the orgasm too, you know, all the foreplay up to the climax. It's perfectly possible for somebody else to come along and analyse it on that level.

When somebody at the EC convention asked, "How come ordinary murders take place off to one side?" you and Bill didn't seem to pick up on it. Afterwards I checked and found that he was right—shootings or stabbings tended to take place "off-screen." I felt that supported my "taste" theory. There's no reason to be overly graphic at these points for its own sake.

To come up with the point we wanted to come up with, leading up to the lapse of taste? Yeah, I guess so. You know, "Let's not take that away from the final kick." I'm wondering whether there are also two levels of standards here, the standard of ordinary violence, the everyday kind of violence, which is frightening to me and which I abhor, and then the violence of fantasy, which is a different kind of violence. Dropping a guy into a pot of hot fat and making him into a french-fried potato, that leaves everyday violence and becomes a kind of an unrealistic schizophrenic violence. And that's what I'm thinking about—I could justify it on that level.

Oh, I agree. That's what I don't think today's films are doing.

No, they're really . . . they're just gore. I call them Grand Guignol because the Grand Guignol Theatre in France just tried to show the most gruesome things and make it very real, and I'm not sure that *we* tried to make it real. We may be

* *The passage I was remembering here is actually from* Frontline Combat *# 5, I discovered after the interview. However, it's possible that it was written by Bill Gaines. —JB*

accused of making it real, but in our mind it was more . . . like the punchline of a joke.

I think you often gave such stories to Davis and Ingels, who had very unrealistic styles.

Well Graham and Davis both had what I call the gothic look, Ghastly especially. And Davis had that kind of hairy look. We gave them the horrible ones because they were horrible, and we gave guys like Kamen and Evans the nice clean ones—like razors in the wall.

Practical jokes seem to be a recurring EC theme.

Practical jokes that backfire, right?

There's usually not much sympathy for the practical joker. They're presented as minor villains of life. I understand that Bill was a practical joker.

We were *both* practical jokers. We did all kinds of things to each other. He pulled practical jokes on people around the office, like having his "brother" come in and storm and yell at Anthony. Are you trying to say that you're noticing that the practical jokers in our stories got all kinds of just desserts while we were running around doing it free and clear? Well, I don't know what the answer to that is. I guess we were just working within the formula, and the formula was that somebody had to get his just desserts, and whether he was a practical joker or a guy who screwed his partner, or who screwed his partner's wife, everyone had to get punished. There was a kind of underlying morality, I thought, in all of this stuff, even though neither of us were religious people. It's interesting that when I went on to become the editor of *Mad* magazine I carried this, whatever morality it is into *Mad*. And some guy came to us at one point and wanted to do a book called *The Mad Morality*. He thought that we were preaching the ten commandments better than some preachers were preaching it in the pulpit, and he gave a lot of examples in his book. I think he called me a rabbi, or something. So I guess that even though we were sinning ourselves and weren't getting punished, we felt that sinners should get punished. [*Laughs.*] Whether we unconsciously wished for punishment ourselves, I don't know.

Another recurring theme was siamese twins.

Oh, right—"The Basket" [HoF # 7].

There were about six stories.

You know, I've never really analysed it too much, but I'm wondering whether this theme reflected Bill's and my interdependence upon each other, that we were like siamese twins in terms of the way we worked together. Did that come to your mind at all?

No, but it's an interesting thought. In a lot of EC stories everyone hates everyone else and there are no sympathetic characters. The siamese twin stories are usually warmer. You're usually rooting for someone in those stories. Your sympathies are strongly with the good head in "The Basket."

I haven't any comment on that, except that certainly my own personal feelings have always been warmer towards someone with an affliction than toward someone who was perfectly healthy who screwed his buddy. I'm trying to remember this particular one. [*He reads through story.*] Incidentally, here I am, having written a lot of this stuff, and having edited almost all of it, and I have no copies except in bound books. It shows you that I never really expected anything to happen from it.

What's the matter with bound books?

Oh, one old dogeared copy that my kids have read and the kids of my second marriage have read and thumbed through. That's about all that's left. Old Bill was smart—he packed away 12 copies of each issue.

"Corker" [HoF # 21] is a very interesting concept.

[*He reads through story.*] We came up with some good ones. I often wonder whether some of this stuff could be

HI YA, FELLAS! HERE'S HAPPY JACK KAMEN! D'JA EVER HEAR THE ONE ABOUT...
(SOB!) (SOB!)
(SOB!) (SNIFFLE!) (SOB!)
TALLEY SHEET
LOSSES GAINS
SALES REPORT- TWO-FISTED TALES.
THE URGE TO KILL!

written in text form—of course we did that in the PictoFiction—but put into text form and just brought out as a collection of short stories, whether they would work.

On some you can just remove the pictures and have the story with the text that's left.

No, I said that before when I was looking at them. Between the captions describing what's going on and the dialogue completing it, you really don't need the pictures.

Did you write "Together They Lie" [VoH # 33]?

What's the date?

October-November 1953.

Didn't those guys come to work for us around the end of '53?

I know Wessler started in October, and this story was written around April.

[*He reads through story.*] I don't recall. It's in the same issue as "Let the Punishment Fit the Crime" which I remember was an original of ours. I don't know whether I wrote this with Bill's plotting as usual, or whether we had then started to use Jack Oleck, who was my favorite, incidentally. Carl Wessler was next, and then came the other guys, Werstein and Bernstein.

Did Werstein and Bernstein write for the New Trend, the horror?

I don't think so. I think they came later.

They just wrote for the New Direction?

Right, yeah.

Did Bernstein write Psychoanalysis?

Yeah. Not . . . yeah, well, kind of.

I recall hearing that the character Mark Stone was supposed to be partly autobiographical on his part.

It's possible. I remember that I did a lot of rewriting and editing on the scripts that came in. Less with Oleck than with guys like Werstein.

Wessler still has his scripts.

Really. Has anybody bothered to compare them to the comics?

I've only checked the first pages of his scripts, because that's what he sent me so I could identify the stories. On those, there's some minor copy editing, but otherwise few changes.

First pages aren't really indicative of the rest of the script. The openings might have been OK in most cases. That's too bad—it would have been interesting to see.

Were Wessler and Oleck the only two outside writers who did any volume of work for the New Trends (except for the very beginning)?

Yeah, I would say that. I always wondered why a guy like Jack Oleck didn't go on to write novels. He had a good style. He did write one that I know of, that Roman empress thing [Messalina]. But why didn't he just go on from there? I think that Oleck could have been a Stephen King, I really believe that. I like Jack. And I liked his writing. If we were hard pressed in turning out material and I was working from scripts, his stuff was so close to what I had been writing that it was easiest for me to adapt.

How about the science fiction—did you get outside writers at the same point that you did in the horror?

I don't remember. We may have. Or Bill and I may have continued to write the science fiction.

Did you write any New Direction stories yourself?

I really don't remember at this point. I know I wrote *Panic.*

Can we look over Panic *to find out which ones you wrote?*

The ones that weren't funny.

Yeah, the ones that were funny.

That *weren't* funny.

That weren't funny? No, I think it was the other way around. I think the first two issues, which weren't really copies of Mad *but had your covers and your own stamp, were quite good. Your covers were a bit diabolical—the kid blowing up the train.*

With the atomic bomb, yeah. There's our concern about the bomb again. I remember that. And trapping Santa with a great big trap, wasn't it? I guess I was trying to make a transition, and I wasn't succeeding too well.

No, those first two issues were good. They sort of took the humorous aspects of your horror books and made them more humorous to create something that was funny, yet compatible with your approach and style. Then the book became more influenced by Kurtzman's Mad.

I don't know whether it was the book or the writers. It could have been the writers. I know I had Jack Mendelson. Is that all I had?

That's the only name I've heard. The things you didn't write were just joke compendiums or inadequate copies of Kurtzman's Mad. *If* Panic *had continued* not *as a second* Mad, *but just a funny book from EC . . .*

I always felt badly about *Panic,* in that it was one of six books that I was doing while Harvey was doing just *Mad.* I always felt that if I had had the time to spend like he spent on *Mad* that I could have done a better job. But it was just a one week book for me. I think that when I took over *Mad* magazine itself I was able to justify to some extent the potential that I felt I had in the field of satire. But the transition . . . I'm glad you liked it. I'm not sure I was happy with it.

I only liked the first two issues, actually.

What was in them? The titles of the stories will help me.

"My Gun is the Jury."

Now that was straight satire. I wrote that myself.

"Little Red Riding Hood" was the Grim Fairy Tale carry-over. For "The Night Before Christmas" I assume you just gave the poem to Elder.

Yeah. And immediately got into trouble.

In the second issue—"The Lady or the Tiger" is something Kurtzman wouldn't have done. He'd have tackled "African Scream," naturally doing it differently, but "The Lady or the Tiger" is uniquely Panic. *"Breakfast with the Fershlugginers" and "Come Back Little Streetcar" . . .*

Boy, pretty sophisticated. Where did I lose you? What was in the third issue?

"Li'l Melvin," "The Quite-a-man."

OK, so we were getting more into the straight satire.

"Mother Goon's Nertzery Rhymes," I never felt that Orlando was a very funny artist.

I never felt that way either. [*Laughs.*] Joe was good in other things, and he's gone on to great heights over at DC, but

I didn't think that his artwork had a humorous look. But in those days, we were a family. And we still are, as a matter of fact. I've got artists today that I don't think are particularly funny, but belong to the family and so we use them.

You wrote all those stories in the third issue, right?

Yeah, I think I wrote all those. Sorry.

I felt at that point you were trying to make it more like Mad.

You say, "make it more like *Mad,*" but, you know, *Mad* wasn't doing that much specific satire. Could we do a parallel of the equivalent *Mad* issue for *Panic* # 3?

"Starchie," "From Eternity Back to Here," "Mark Trade."

So we were parallelling, OK. I guess I *was* consciously making it a sister magazine to *Mad.*

You recently said that Ingels didn't like the physical horror. But he had an awful lot of stories like that.

Yeah. Well, that's probably why he didn't like it. [*Laughs.*] I remember that we had some problems with Ingels in terms of the horror. He vacillated. Sometimes he didn't like doing them. I guess he got flack from his family, or who knows what happened.

Did you have a lot of discussions with the artists about the horror?

Do you mean, in terms of being against it?

Whether it was going too far . . .

Oh. Some of the artists were more verbal than others. Some of them just went ahead and did it, you know. They were just very commercial, and . . . they too were making their living. Jack Davis never objected to anything. I never got any flack from Jack Kamen. Krigstein, yeah. Krigstein was verbal on several levels. Some on the moral level, what we were doing, some in terms of the layouts, the art of comics. He had some very interesting theories, and I think if we'd been allowed to go on we might have developed into something in terms of some of the things he did. I remember in—was it *Impact*?—We did "Master Race."

That was originally scheduled for Shock SuspenStories *# 17.*

Oh, and it was kicked over into *Impact* when we dropped the others? Well, *Impact was Shock SuspenStories* without as much horror. It was still the snap endings. I remember the appeal he made for opening up "Master Race" into eight pages. We were having all kinds of problems, whether we would let him do it—and he showed it to us, and it worked out very well. And he was right. You know what's confusing me right at this minute is—if I had Wessler and Oleck, was I still doing originals too?

Did you write "Master Race"?

Yeah, I wrote it.

You did write it. I had asked Bill long ago, and I thought he had asked you and told me no.

Oh yeah, Bill and I plotted that. I remember it was a great plot and I liked it. Definitely. I'm almost certain. Why, have you found any other source?

No. But all the other stories in that issue were written by Wessler.

You mean Wessler wrote "Master Race"? [*Incredulous.*]

No he didn't. That's sure.

I know Oleck didn't.

He said he didn't. But most of the stories at the time "Master Race" was written were by outside writers.

No, I think "Master Race" was mine. I remember the plotting of it, the kicker on it. I wish the heck I could prove it to you one way or the other, but I can't.

I'm glad you told me, because it'll be in The Smithsonian Book of Comic Book Comics.

Really! *Oh, it's my story!* [*Laughter.*] You know, I'm very sorry, frankly, that the writers didn't get bylines in those days. Obviously there was no reason in the early days because we were writing them all, except for Johnny and Harvey. And later on when we picked up the other guys, maybe Bill didn't want to disturb the flow that was going on in terms of the fans thinking it was going to be the same stuff. But it bothered *me* when the first reprints started to appear, and there were all kinds of discussions about Wood's story, and Davis's story, and Ingels' story, and nobody was talking about Feldstein's story. And I had given up the artwork in order to write these things. But that was awhile back, and I was feeling unappreciated. You know, there's never been an accurate discussion of "My

"My World" [WS # 22].

There was some discussion of the story at the science fiction panel at the EC convention. I never thought of that as "Wood's story," although apparently the impetus for the story was these little descriptions of what Wood wanted to draw.

Wood never had a conversation with me about it.

Written descriptions, saying that he wanted to draw this and that.

Is that what he said?

And that you had tried to plot a story with this stuff, and it was no good because it was just trying to crowd all these things in.

Bullshit!

And so you came up with the idea to use the visuals in the way you did.

No. Well, there's a bit of truth in that. What actually happened is that Bill and I *didn't* come up with a plot, and I said, "Just let me write something about all the things in science fiction." And that was it. I sat down and wrote that thing with my own visualization of what would go into it.

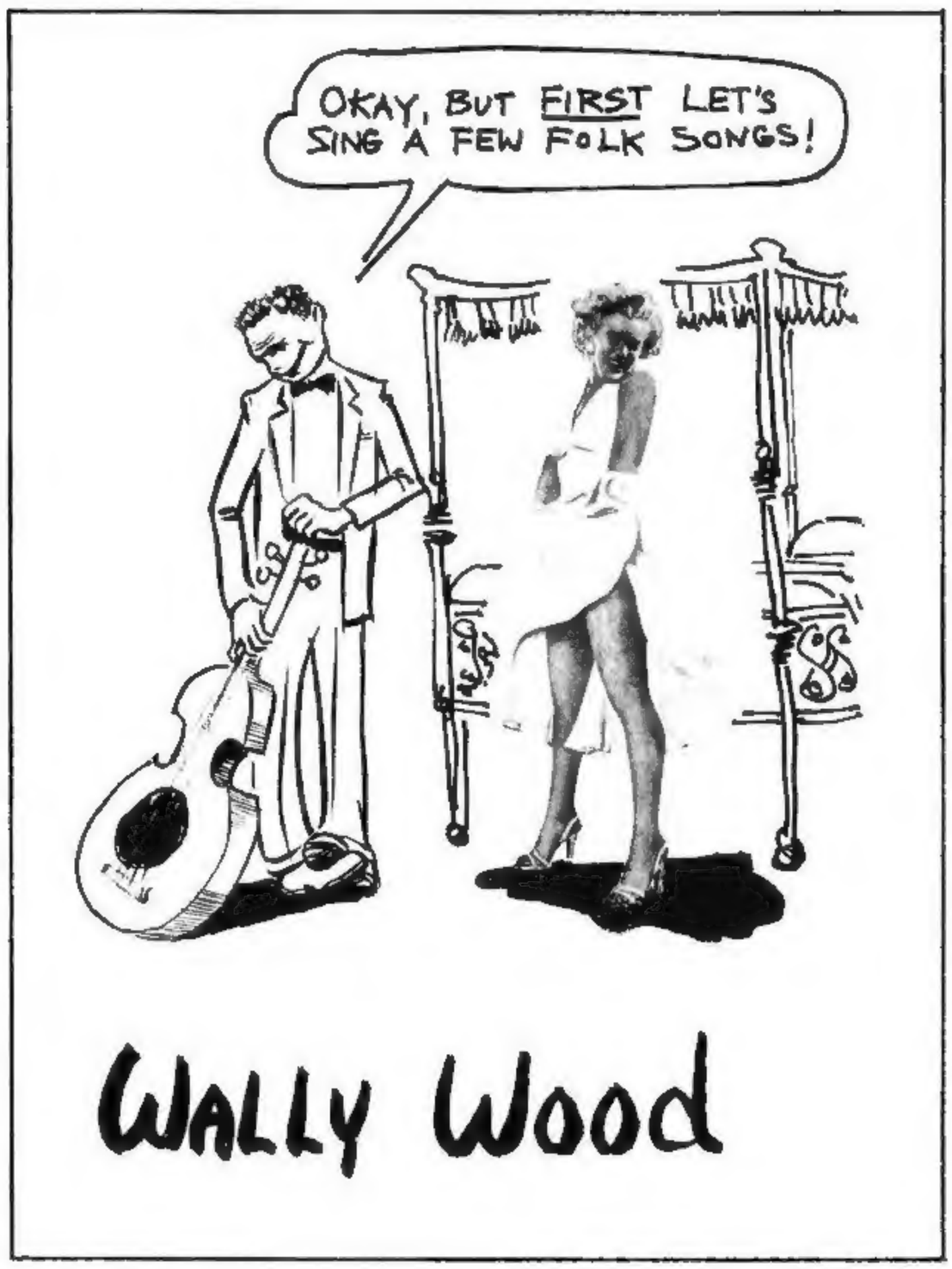
It's certainly a unique story.

I liked it when I wrote it. I was very happy and proud of it. And of course it never occurred to me that with the illustration I would lost authorship of it, it would become more of Wood's story. And when it appeared in one of Russ Cochran's portfolios a few years back, there was no acknowledgement there either. I felt badly about that.

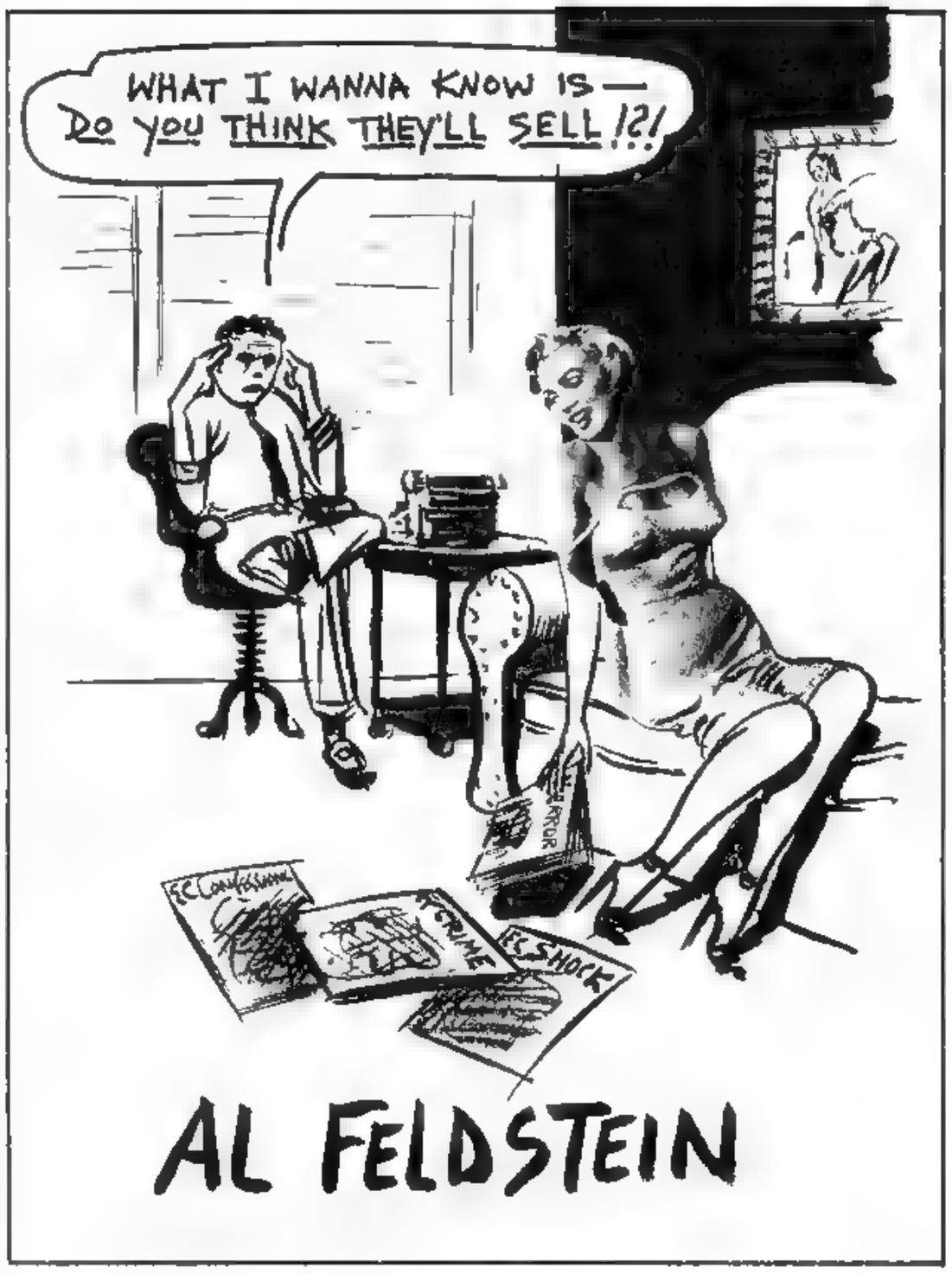
This interview took place on July 16, 1981; it was conducted, transcribed and edited by John Benson. Its purpose was to record Feldstein's comments for the annotations to Russ Cochran's* EC Library, *but the resulting transcript seemed of a piece, with themes and cross-references that would have been lost if it were broken up into small excerpts. Russ Cochran and Al Feldstein have kindly consented to allow its appearance in* Squa Tront, *as long as Feldstein's comments also appear in the EC library. However, there won't be a complete overlap—some of the material here won't be in the Library, and the Library books will have some comments on specific stories that don't appear here. The illustrations accompanying the interview were done as posters by Feldstein for display at the 1951 EC Christmas party.

The last EC Christmas party was in 1955. According to Frank Jacobs in **The Mad World of William M. Gaines,** *it "was something of a wake." The big cash bonuses, a thing of the past, were replaced by $4.95 sterling salt and pepper shakers. Right after the holiday season Gaines had to let most of the staff go. Though the art for the posters that adorned the walls of that party (seen here) seems rushed, the ideas are as clever as ever, revealing some character aspect or foible of each member of the EC staff—Crandall, for example, seemed to think each masterpiece he brought in was his poorest job, and Ingels always wanted an advance. (Note: the outsize poster for Rick Doonan can be seen in a photograph on page 8 of* **Squa Tront #** *8.)*

FIRST CAME KINSEY... and
"The Sexual Behavior of the Human Male"
Now comes E.C. ... and
"The Special Behavior of the Inhuman Artist"
OR
"WHAT OUR BOYS WOULD DO IF THEY WERE ALONE WITH MARILYN MONROE"



Illustrations copyright © 1983 William M. Gaines.


WHAT I WANNA KNOW IS—
DO YOU THINK THEY'LL SELL!?!
AL FELDSTEIN

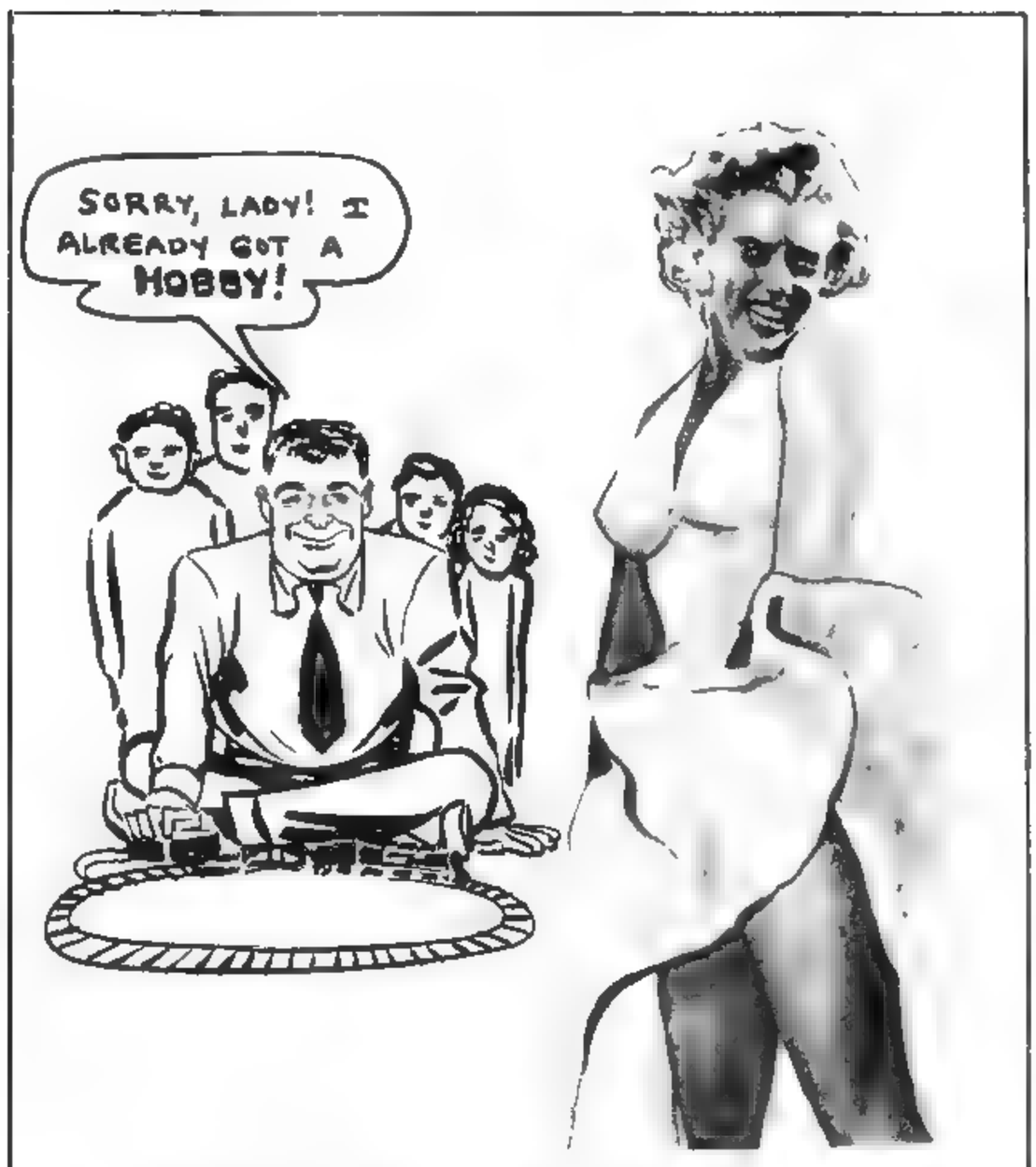
WHATSIS? WHATSIS?
NO... NO... NOPE... NOPE!
DEFINITELY NOT!
BAD TASTE!
NOPE!
HUP!
HUP!
HARVEY KURTZMAN

YOU THOUGHT THAT WAS GOOD?
WAIT'LL YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT
THE BRITISH COLONEL OF INDIA...
BILL ELDER

MA'M
AH' WANTS—
UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER!
MA'M
JACK DAVIS

REED CRANDALL

GRAHAM INGELS



JACK KAMEN

John Putnam

THE EC FANZINES PART 5

A LEGEND IN ITS TIME

By Ron Parker

The Comic Book Price Guide regularly refers to it as one of the two finest EC fanzines of its time. In a 1960 article in *Coronet* magazine about *Mad*, Richard Gehman touched upon the phenomenon of EC fanzines, dubbing it "the king of them all." And John Benson refers to it simply as "the legendary *Hoohah.*"

All of which both amuses and humbles me. After all, I didn't set out to create a legend.

Hoohah! (the exclamation point was generally used to be consistent with the title's origin, the first story in the first issue of *Mad*) is something of a mystery to most of today's EC fans, even those interested in the fannish aspects of the era, simply because only a few copies remain in the hands of collectors. Even at its peak, probably no more than fifty copies of *Hoohah!* were distributed, so knowledge of it is limited to comments, references and perhaps a reprinted article. So if it is indeed legendary, it is similarly ethereal. Even the one person who should have a complete file (namely the Editor and Publisher) had to borrow two issues from John Benson to reconstruct the complete ten issue run.

Whether or not it was actually legendary is a question that is perhaps not for me to answer. Simply because of its timing, it was certainly something of a misfit. The fanzines that preceded *Hoohah!*, which have been discussed in this series, were created in the heyday of the EC comic reign, which gave them the opportunity to analyze and comment upon eleven bi-monthly titles. They had, as an EC fan would appreciate, meat for the grinder. What *Hoohah!* faced when it started in late 1955, as the earlier fanzines faded into oblivion, was the demise of the whole EC comics line, a less than exciting editorial prospect for any sort of fanzine future. However, because of the appreciative nature of EC fans, this is precisely what sustained the fanzine. It was the last of its kind, starting at the end of an era. As the contents page of *Hoohah!* # 9 noted, stealing a line from *Mad*, "Number One In A Field Of One."

Certainly, within that era, several fanzines did follow *Hoohah!*, including Doug Brown's *Spoof!* (note the similar usage of the exclamation point), but they weren't true EC fanzines, relying heavily on coverage of Kurtzman's work after he left *Mad*, and are more properly qualified as the beginning of comic book fanzines in general. Which at least places *Hoohah!* as the last of the true EC fanzines of the 1950's and, if it rose to any greatness, it was simply because it had a monopoly on the talent of the times.

There was Fred von Bernewitz, creator of *The Complete EC Checklist* . . . Ted White, subsequently a prolific jazz commentator and sf writer and editor who enjoyed the dubious distinction of having Harlan Ellison dedicate a book to him. E. Nelson Bridwell, now with D.C. comics, was a contributor. Larry Ivie (editor of *Monsters and Heroes*) was a primary source of material. And, most importantly, there was Archie Goodwin, now of Marvel Comics fame, sharpening his fangs before helping to launch the Warren magazines. Bhob Stewart eventually began contributing massive studies of *Mad* to help as we began to run out of things about EC to comment on. Larry Stark wrote the classic "Elegy," a requiem to the EC comics era and his involvement as Number One Fan. Other contributors included Paul Davis (whose art has subsequently graced the covers of *TV Guide* and other magazines) and some fellow named John Benson.

Even the advertising section occasionally featured a talent of the future, most notably an EC want list in the sixth issue from Russell Myers, who would graduate from looking for EC's to drawing the *Broomhilda* comic strip.

The talent was there. It was simply a matter of publishing it.

AUTHOR-ARTIST GOODWIN & PIPE

Paul Davis, whose talents are now highly in demand for commercial advertising, magazine covers and theatrical posters, wasn't really an EC fan—in a plea for a rational approach to comics in a letter in Hoohah! *# 6 he said, "I am not affected by the disease . . . known as 'EC fever,' but various and sundry of my friends and enemies are." One of those friends was Archie Goodwin, and Davis sent this drawing to* Hoohah! *with the suggestion that he write a short biography of Goodwin to accompany it, but Goodwin's own feature and self-portrait rendered the offer superfluous.*

In *Squa Tront* # 8 John Benson accurately pointed out that *Hoohah!* rose from "a very humble beginning" before becoming the best of the EC fanzines. Trust Benson's judgment on that one; I know he has a copy of the first issue, a disaster that had an initial circulation of six copies, which was about six copies too many.

Hoohah! was the product of a teenager in love with EC's and, oddly enough, never would have been created without the existence of *Potrzebie*, the other of the "two finest EC fanzines" of the period referred to in *The Comic Book Price Guide. Pot,* as we affectionately referred to it in the days before such a word denoted more serious and questionable substances, had been created by Bhob Stewart and Larry Stark and published by Ted White when he lived in Virginia, but it eventually ended up in the hands of Larry Clowers, an EC fan in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Stewart, Stark, and White, had presumably gone on to better things, unaware that something called *Hoohah!* would at least delay their exit from the world of EC fandom.

I was living in Tulsa then, not that far away from Hot Springs, when my best friend, Mike Beistle, went there for a weekend trip with his parents. Mike and I were both ardent EC fans by that time, I having discovered a copy of *Mad* # 8 on a supermarket rack and learning about the other EC titles through their house ads. Our close personal interests in acting, basketball and most literary pursuits logically dictated that my interest in EC would also become his. We had both developed into fanatical EC collectors. It was during Mike's weekend in Hot Springs that he happened to meet a girl named Nancy Bell in, as you might assume, a used comic book store. Nancy was a friend of Larry Clowers and, while I suspect Mike might have had ideas about this chance encounter that transcended a simple discussion of Ghastly's latest *Haunt of Fear* cover, what he ended up with was a copy of the fifth issue of *Potrzebie*, which he brought back to Tulsa.

Not that he was going to show it to me, you understand. We were intense rivals when it came to collecting back issues of EC's, and he saw this newfound fanzine as an avenue of communication towards increasing his personal collection—an area of availability that I had no access to. But he braggingly told me about the fanzine, and I was intrigued.

His secretiveness was hardly surprising. Our intensity in racing each other to the local used book store after school was such that, on one occasion, the only reason I got there in time to find the second issue of *Weird Fantasy* was because Mike looked back during the "race" (he was always faster than I was) and promptly ran into a parking meter. And, if you were a true EC fan in those days, you didn't stop to pick up your best friend simply because he was crumpled up at the foot of a parking meter. Not when the second issue of *Weird Fantasy* might be waiting for you at the outrageous price of five cents.

But it was Mike's comments about *Potrzebie* that really brought out my devious nature. I was a potential writer without an outlet. Someone was publishing an amateur magazine about my favorite subject. Since my creative taste buds had to savor such a publication, and since Mike wasn't about to let me see it until he procured every available EC in the country, there was only one solution. I simply dropped by his house one afternoon when I knew he wasn't home and gained admittance to his room from his mother on the pretense of awaiting his arrival. And, having nothing better to do while I was waiting, my only pastime seemed to be in reading something called *Potrzebie* # 5. It just happened to be lying around, you understand, once I located it.

And I knew that I was about to become a fanzine publisher.

Of course, I was lacking a few things, principally a mimeograph to publish it on. I did have a typewriter, a gift from my parents who perhaps sensed my interest in writing before I was even aware of such instincts, and I managed to cajole them into investing in a junior size mimeograph and some blank stencils for their only son. They probably considered it a waste of money, which we never really had much of, but they indulged me.

Hoohah! was born.

If someone were to ask me today to see a copy of *Hoohah!* # 1, I'd probably lie to them and say that I didn't have a copy. My first mistake was that I drew the cover and wrote most of the ensuing eighteen pages. My cover artistry consisted of one character chasing another ("I'll teach you to steal my EC's"; "You don't need to teach me, I already know how!") in a cartooning style that would cause most first grade art teachers to consider retirement.

The contents included several pages of quips and jokes from *Ballyhoo*; information about the New Direction comics and EC Fan Addict Club that I had obtained in an outrageously expensive (at that time) phone call to Bill Gaines; a list of addresses of old bookstores in Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico (and while I listed two in Tulsa, I somewhat intentionally failed to include the one wherein I continually found EC's in abundance); and a short-lived serial I wrote (it was the first and last chapter) titled "The Saga of Fearless Frank, or They Got Him In The End." The issue also included the notation that circulation was six copies. As Benson said, a "humble" beginning.

Still, suffering as much from my inexperience with a mimeograph ("Oh, you mean you're supposed to put *ink* in that little hole?") as from my material, the issue offered a faint promise. It included a review of *Shock Illustrated* # 1, the first Picto-Fiction magazine, by Archie Goodwin.

And it was Archie Goodwin who helped sustain the early issues of *Hoohah!* with his writing, cartoons and encouragement although, as Archie might be inclined to say, "The mysterious Them must have done it!" Goodwin was not involved with the earlier EC fanzines, and it was only poetic justice that I should meet him in the previously mentioned bookstore while scrambling through piles of comics in search of old EC's. And it was his own fault that he blurted out "I've already got it" when I pulled a particularly rare EC out of one of the stacks, no doubt sandwiched between the latest issue of *Superman* and a recent *Batman*, and enthusiastically apprised the world of my discovery.

It was a meeting that led to a friendship between aficionados of EC's, hardly jeopardized when he subsequently gave me about fifty extra copies from his personal collection, all in mint condition. And in the ensuing weeks after our

meeting I spent more than one afternoon at his house, perusing his nearly complete EC collection, and babbling about my ideas for an EC fanzine. It was a dream, and I knew I couldn't write it all myself. And it was a dream that Archie was willing to help with.

Circulation six? But it was a labor of love. And a beginning.

As with any new publication, the title was a problem. "Potrzebie" had been used, and I didn't want to get into the "E.C. This" and "E.C. That" formula that had been standard for the earlier fanzines. "Hoohah!," as I mentioned, was the title of the first story in *Mad*, and was suggested in passing one evening by Gene Kelly, an avid EC fan who never became involved in the fannish mainstream beyond *Hoohah!*

Within our local group, Kelly was something of a discovery for me. He lived in a small town about fifty miles from Tulsa where my grandparents lived, the kind of Midwestern town where you fondly recall the smell of freshly cooked chicken on a Sunday afternoon and look in the refrigerator for your "special" lemon meringue pie. Kelly had a coded letter in an early *Mad*, which drew several coded responses from other readers. So, considering the geographical advantage, I naturally looked him up. Not without some trepidation, you understand, since his residence turned out to be a small chicken farm I had to walk past anytime I wanted to visit the local drugstore in search of the latest EC's. It was the sort of place that you keep wondering why you forgot to bring along a clothespin every time you walked past it. But Kelly and I hit it off (as strangers with a common interest will do), and he subsequently moved to Tulsa (as in, The Big City) to pursue his eventual career as a commercial artist. And, with such talent and interest, he logically became a contributor to *Hoohah!*

It was a peculiarly local cast of characters: Parker, the aspiring writer; Goodwin, the aspiring cartoonist; Kelly, the aspiring artist; and Beistle, who we never quite figured out what he was aspiring to.

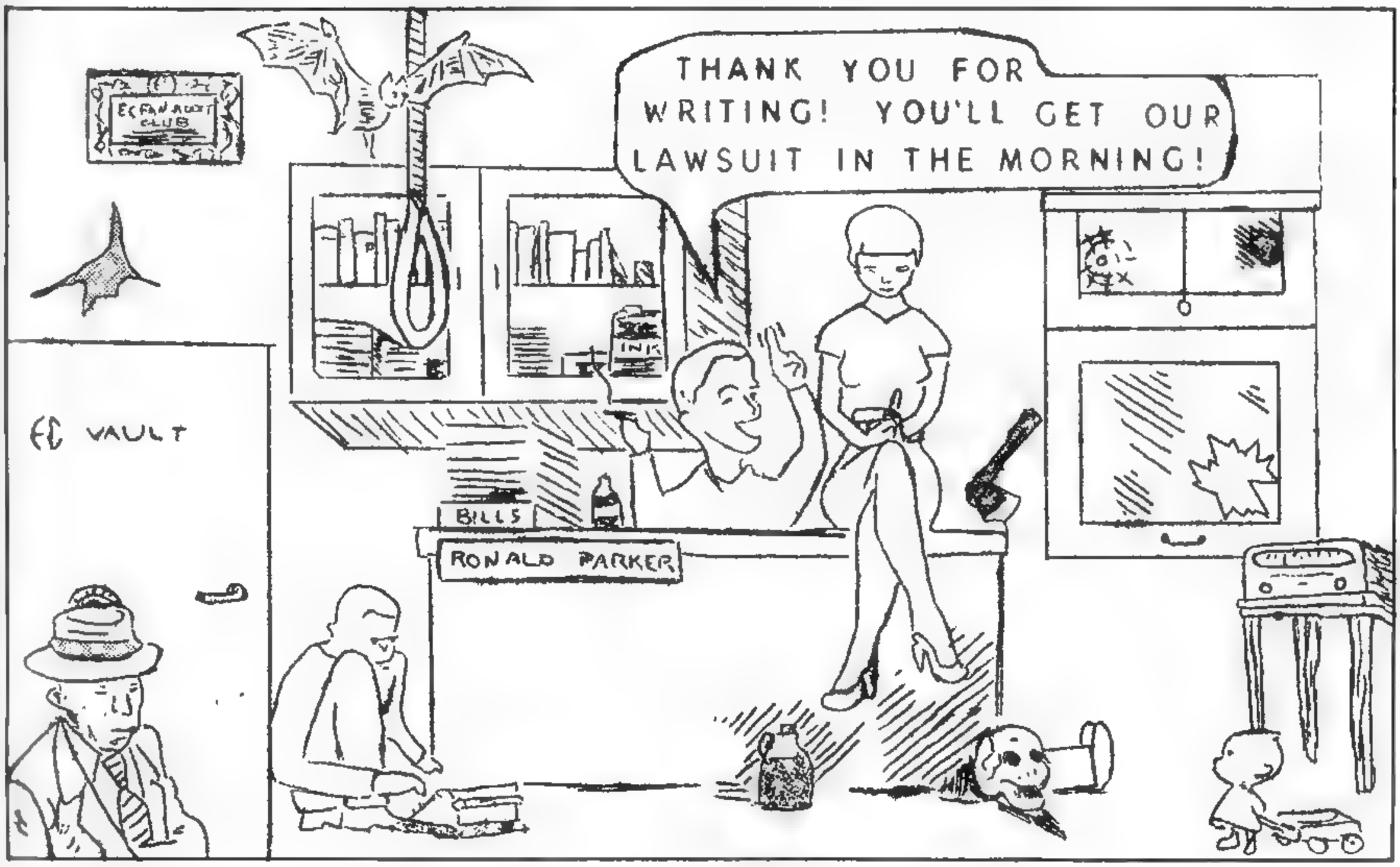
Actually, Beistle may have been the most ardent EC fan of the group, but his interest faded dramatically when he ultimately, and quite literally, tore up his EC collection of around two hundred issues in a fit of depression after a stern lecture from his mother over some bad grades and the questioning insults of a girlfriend of the moment who thought that anyone who actually read "comic books" was suspect. I tried to salvage parts of his folly. Later, his drama training led him to Florida to make English translations of esoteric foreign plays while teaching students how to become perpetual students. I recently phoned him on the occasion of his birthday to apprise him of the current value of his once complete (and intact) run of *Vault of Horror*. He sounded a little ill at the end of the conversation.

But the point is that *Hoohah!* was a local production. It didn't start with nationally experienced fans and writers, simply because I didn't know they existed. It was a dream, and a straw in the wind, among a few people who loved EC and wanted to communicate this love affair with a line of comic books to others. We appreciated the writing, the artwork, the talent. And we wanted others to appreciate it as we did.

The second issue of *Hoohah!* was much more professional than the first for two reasons. One, I'd learned where the hole in the mimeograph was where you were supposed to insert the ink, thus greatly helping people who might have been interested in actually reading it. And, two, Goodwin drew the cover. As a matter of fact, Goodwin almost dominated the issue, contributing a review of the first issue of *Crime Illustrated* and a piece on EC artists' work outside of the EC line. Parker, in the meantime, chipped in with an incomplete analysis of Pre-Trend EC's and some more stale jokes that were no doubt lifted from *Ballyhoo*.

What made the second issue even more interesting was the listing of Larry Ivie as a "New York contact." Shortly after *Hoohah!*'s inaugural, Goodwin had left Tulsa to attend the University of Oklahoma, about a hundred miles away, but he was also in the process of trying to get into New York Cartoonists & Illustrators School (later to be renamed the School of Visual Arts). Consequently he had established several correspondents in New York. And, while Ivie only

Just as EC sent readers an illustrated thank-you-for-your-note, so did Hoohah!



contributed a letter to the second issue of *Hoohah!*, it was the beginning of our exposure to the Outside World. We didn't realize it at the time, but *Hoohah!* was coming of age.

Whatever the circulation of that second issue may have been, it obviously reached more than six readers with a dream, because the third issue was well represented by outside contributors from the previously unknown world of EC fandom, including Fred von Bernewitz and Bob Stewart. Despite EC's problems Bill Gaines had taken the time to send a letter of encouragement and a five dollar bill for "a lifetime subscription."

And Archie Goodwin, in the process of moving to New York, contributed a review of the first issue of *Confessions Illustrated* (somewhat reluctantly, I suspect) from Oklahoma University that was accompanied by the following letter: "Let's face it, what HooHah needs is more about Eeeee Seeee, and what HooHah has got is very little about Eaiee Ceiee. Without some odd to practically sleep on their doorstep and keep us constantly informed, we are sort of stymied. So someone has got to sacrifice: so I'll go to New York after the Xmas holidays as foreign correspondent. My Dad has said it's okay for me to go to Cartoonists and Illustrators School and start this next semester with them. *But* he doesn't think that he can really afford to send me till next year; he doesn't think that he can raise the cash that I would need for the immediate trip and the first few months that soon. So if you can just take

Al Feldstein reads a copy of Hoohah! *# 5 in the EC offices, May 1956. (Photo by Larry Ivie.)*

two or three hundred dollars out of the HooHah money reserve, and let me have it to make the safari to New Yawk, I'll promise that I won't miss one little bit of information that flutters around the Easy offices. So how 'bout it, izit a deal? Surely you, a magazine editor, can raise a paltry two or three hundred dollars. You know, sell your mother or something."

Somehow, despite the lack of financial assistance from the *Hoohah!* offices (for one thing, my mother objected to being sold), Goodwin made it to "New Yawk" in enough time to include his account of his first visit to the EC (alias Easy, aka Eaiee Ceiee) in the third issue of *Hoohah!*, an amusing piece that concentrated on his failure to stuff various originals of EC artwork and cover paintings into an inadequate shirt.

Hoohah! # 3 also included a short-lived item I called the "EC Collectors Competition List," which I created out of awe at Goodwin's collection as well as the egoism of thinking I had the second best collection in all of known fandom as I perceived it to exist at that time. It listed Goodwin at 319 copies, with Parker and von Bernewitz staggering in behind him with 226 and 196 respectively. No contest, but with a larger fanzine readership it might have evolved into an EC trading corner idea when copies cost a nickel instead of several hundred dollars.

It was an issue that also included a pre-stencilled ad by Ted White for von Bernewitz's original *EC Checklist*, with Bill Gaines being credited for news notes, including the fact that he had married Nancy Siegel. Archie Goodwin had found the time to draw another cover as well as a full page cartoon. And Bob Stewart noted what he saw in the growth of *Hoohah!* in a letter. "Allow me," he wrote, "as the editor of the first EC fanzine, to congratulate you on *Hoohah!* It is neat, legible, newsy, funny and promising." Obviously Stewart had not seen the first issue of *Hoohah!* when he wrote his letter, but it was encouraging egoboo at the time, not unlike receiving a five dollar bill from Bill Gaines when you wondered if you were asking too much by charging subscribers 15¢ a copy.

Some readers subsequently contended that the third issue of *Hoohah!* wasn't as good as the second issue that had attracted so much praise, which bothered me because I was increasingly influenced at the time by the old Ted White "Every Issue Better" motto that he used in sf fandom before becoming a Dirty Old Pro.

So I intentionally set out to make the fourth issue "special," especially in view of the fact that EC was dying and I suspected I was running out of a subject to write about. "I think," Goodwin wrote to me at the time, "that your fourth issue should be an all-out smash issue and hang the cost (easy for me to say), because there may not be much to write about after that anyhow."

Goodwin was correct, of course, but he may have underestimated the loyalty of EC fans in general, and his own love and interest in particular. *Hoohah!*, unlike EC, was in an ascendency, carried there by the love of a dying entity through the loyalty of its fans.

If *Hoohah!* # 4 did nothing else, it reflected my improvements in mimeographing skills, since through correspondence Ted White had convinced me of the virtues of lettering guides as opposed to hand carving stencils with a kitchen knife. Thanks to Ted's patience, I even learned what a stylus was, and my new experience was apparent with the "Staff" page in that issue in which I combined all of my various new lettering guides into one master conglomeration of styles. It might not have looked very professional but it certainly was neater than earlier issues.

The "Staff" was always sort of an ethereal thing anyway, the principal contributors for a given issue being assigned "titles" for that issue. And it wasn't even listed in every issue. If there was any consistency whatsoever outside of the "Editor and Publisher" it was Archie Goodwin's relatively stable status as "Assistant Editor and Art Director."

The latter capacity was certainly evidenced in the fourth issue, which included five Goodwin cartoons scattered throughout the issue, line drawings in a VIP tradition that represented a High School trend that was common at the time, not only with Goodwin but also *Broomhilda*'s Russ Myers and another close friend of theirs, Don Lindmark (who would later room with Myers at Oklahoma University). DAAL (as Lindmark signed his work) was talented enough that I once published a collection of his cartoons when I was involved in science fiction fandom. It was favorably received; yet, among these three contemporaries, DAAL is the one who seems to have disappeared.

Whereas the third issue of *Hoohah!* had included Goodwin's Invasion/Theft of EC article, the fourth issue began Fred von Bernewitz's and Ted White's "We're Off to EC" series, which simply meant that *Hoohah!* readers were not lacking in information about the inner workings at the EC offices. It was always considered a scoop to tell the readers the contents of the next *Mad* before the issue hit the newsstand, and several "special bulletins" were produced between issues of *Hoohah!* simply to convey this valued information as it made its way from New York to Tulsa. Picto-Fiction was certainly a topic of discussion in the fourth issue (recognizing that we were running out of things to discuss), Ted White offering an in depth analysis of EC's entire attempt in the media as opposed to the previous reviews of single issues.

Gene Kelly drew a nude line drawing for the cover, which I discreetly covered up with an overlay of a Goodwin character that had been featured on the cover of the second and third issues. Not that I was being prudish; I was rapidly discovering girls about the same time that Kelly (a few years older than I) was teaching me how they should be drawn. But a nude on the cover of an EC fanzine? Besides, the Goodwin overlay sort of

belonged there, a stubby detective smoking a pipe that had been the central character in Archie's previous two covers. Plus, there was an inherent subtlety in such a character (Archie Goodwin being Nero Wolfe's trusted assistant in the novels) that probably escaped most of the readers.

The Goodwin character never appeared after that issue, although it probably should have, having been established as a tradition much as Alfred E. Neuman was being established on the cover of *Mad*. That it didn't is primarily due to the fact that by the fifth issue Archie Goodwin was alive, well, and starving to death in "New Yawk." That he contributed at all at this time is a testimony to his love and devotion to *Hoohah!*

Kelly and I, in the meantime, decided to "uncover" his nude (at least the top half) in the fifth issue as part of an Art Portfolio section. It was, in a sense, our challenge to Hugh Hefner, while displaying the multiplicity of artistic talent available to me by this time. There was an older Goodwin cartoon that he undoubtedly hated to see in print (Archie always wondered why he hated his work after doing it, the sign of true creative progression that neither of us appreciated at the time), along with a retracing of his hand drawn Christmas card, and several other Kelly drawings that had absolutely nothing to do with EC comics (unless you could fit his German general into *Two-Fisted Tales*).

But it was that line drawing of the nude that got us into some minor trouble with several parents, even though it was buried in a 46 page fanzine. It seems that they didn't appreciate the experimental competition of a budding artist competing with *Playboy* in an EC fanzine.

Still, the oddest thing about the fifth issue was its size, not from page count but because of the physical dimensions of the pages. Whereas earlier issues had been printed on exactly half of an 8½ x 11 sheet, which is fairly standard, this issue measured 6 x 9¼, an odd size by any standards. As with any peculiarity, there was, of course, a reason. The people I was buying my paper from at the time (on a liberal credit basis, I might add), were into the scratch pad business, and cutting all sorts of unusual sized sheets out of your standard sizes. They made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and you have to have been a poor fanzine publisher to appreciate that decision.

Larry Ivie made his first strong appearance in *Hoohah!* # 5, contributing not only an original cover that displaced the Goodwin "tradition" but also the first of a two part article called "The Search For T.C.K." (in which he and Goodwin set out to find the Crypt Keeper in New York), along with a brief piece on M.C. Gaines and the *Famous Funnies* association under a modest byline that proclaimed Ivie as "One of the World's Greatest Comic Collectors." History dims whether I came up with that byline or Ivie did, but I suspect the latter. In any event, *Hoohah!* obviously had developed a prestigious cast of writers.

Unfortunately, Ivie was also the first victim of *Hoohah!*'s size change, sending in a pre-printed two page cartoon insert that suddenly found itself stapled into a slightly larger publication. It was perhaps appropriately, an original strip titled "AARGH!", undoubtedly Ivie's feeling when he saw the size change.

As prolific as Ivie was in the fifth issue (he also contributed two other items and three cartoons), the page count had grown to such an extent that it also included the second installment of "We're Off To E.C." by von Bernewitz and White, an updated guide to the Pre-Trend titles and their

Larry Ivie's original art for the cover of Hoohah! *# 5 is on the left. To the right is the actual cover after the art had been traced onto a mimeograph stencil by Parker.*

numerical transition into the horror and sf titles, several pages of Kelly cartoons, and my own outlandish version of meeting Archie Goodwin while trying to figure out how to throw him off of a bridge so I could steal his EC collection (in those days bridges weren't much different from parking meters). And, if this wasn't enough material, Goodwin found time between tours of 42nd Street in search of hot dog change lying in the gutter to write a science fiction oriented story titled "Peace Conference" which may have been his first published story since *Hoohah!* was his only fannish outlet at the time. Whether he subsequently adapted this professionally or not is something I haven't researched, but it was unusually well received by the readers as a fiction piece in a fanzine that was expected to keep them up to date on the latest EC news on every page.

Not that the EC aspect was overlooked; the most sensational item in the issue was Ted White's "EC Confidential," in which he revealed the truth behind the ongoing mystery of the time: "What Is Potrzebie?" Potrzebie, and what it was, was a favorite EC topic of the time, perhaps the biggest "mystery" they ever created. Yet, there on page six of *Hoohah!* # 5 was the scoop, the Inside Information. It was probably the greatest revelation of the time if you were a puzzled EC fan, ranking on the same level as detailing how to make a hydrogen bomb.

The back cover of that issue also included a Kelly nude, except in this case it was a gorilla (well, we were pretty experimental in those days, what can I tell you?). Kelly had done the back cover for the fourth issue, an Army styled "We Want You" (to read *Hoohah!*) parody, but his gorilla, which was a spontaneously drawn ad for von Bernewitz's *Checklist,* still stands out to me as the best thing he ever drew for the fanzine. I made extensive use of my lettering guides during this one page creation that we put together one evening at my house. I don't recall ever mentioning it to von Bernewitz, who will probably be reading it here for the first time, but the evening that Kelly and I completed the gorilla ad we were so proud of it that I ran off about fifty extra copies and we proceeded down the streets of Tulsa stapling copies to telephone poles, generally tearing off outdated political posters to make room for our creative genius of the moment. I doubt that Fred got a lot of orders for the *Checklist* from this exuberance, but Kelly and I sure had a lot of fun.

Even the letter page of the fifth issue was significant, assuming you ignore one fan's observation (in reference to the cover of the fourth issue) that "Kelly can't draw." A fan named Pat Armstrong (President of the Mad Melvin Club, about which he was subsequently to write one of the strangest articles that ever appeared in the fanzine) asked if *Hoohah!* could force "one or two articles out of Larry Stark." Stark was the acknowledged Number One EC Fan of the era and, as a non-contributor to *Hoohah!* was something of a missing link. He was the one major person involved in EC fandom that was not involved in this stage of its declining development. And it was on the interest expressed in Armstrong's letter that I wrote Larry Stark, asking for a contribution to *Hoohah!* # 6.

To my surprise, Stark came through with an article. It was his only contribution to *Hoohah!* It was also probably the

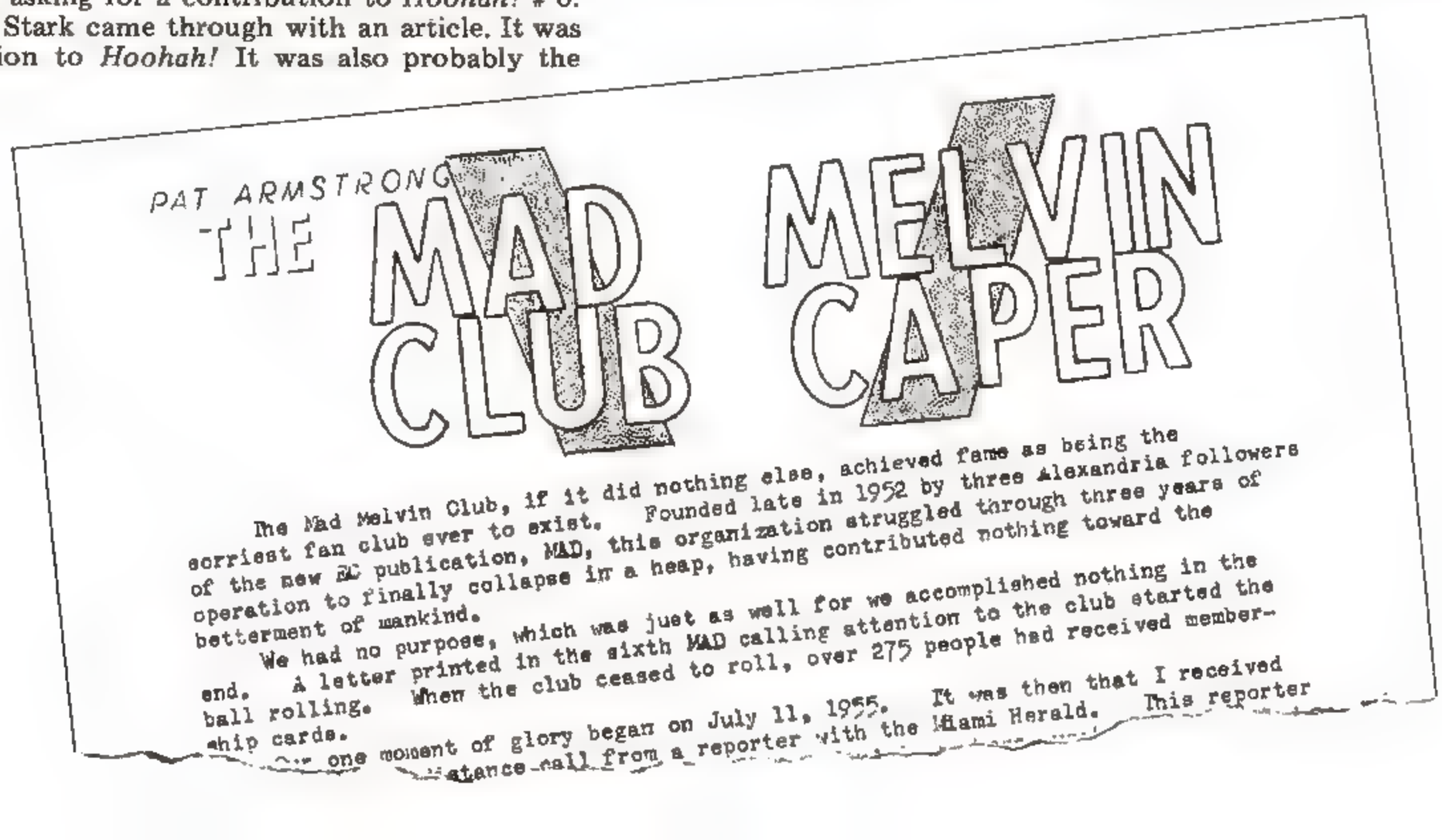
Ted White's three-color mimeographed cover for **Hoohah!** *# 7 probably took half a day to design, stencil and print. The completed job was seen by 50 people at the most. That the cover was hand tipped onto an 8½ x 11 inch sheet (even though Ted hadn't originally intended it to be), added to its elegance.*

greatest article that ever appeared in an EC fanzine. Titled "Elegy," it was an account of Stark's rise and fall with his inside connections with the people at EC. I understand it has been reprinted in later editions of von Bernewitz's *Checklist,* as befits a classic. There is little doubt that *Hoohah!* # 6 was the best of the issues, and "Elegy" was its nucleus. If *Hoohah!* was the legend it is said to be, then this was the best issue of any EC fanzine ever published. But it also contained sadness, for Larry's article expressed the finality of it all. There was little to be said after "Elegy."

Not that the issue was without its brighter aspects. I had been experimenting with multi-color mimeography and decided to print an Archie Goodwin cover (an EC parody signed by "Johny Crud") in three colors, which I had never attempted before. At that time, at least to an amateur, this could only be accomplished in one of two ways: Ink a pad in a variety of colors that would bleed together for a single pass through the mimeograph which you hoped would look slightly creative. Or draw parts of a page on three individual stencils, each of which would be run with that particular colored ink pad, in the hope that the three individual passes of a sheet of paper through the mimeograph might result in some form of synchronization. I chose the latter method, running black for the primary drawing (or, as Archie Goodwin's New York experience would have it, "drawring"). Then I made a red ink run simply to color the flowing curtains that were a major part of the illustration. And then I ran the sheets through again just to get the title, *Hoohah!* in blue ink.

It was a job, three runs just to produce the cover for what ended up as a 54 page issue, but it was fun because Goodwin's cover was so reminiscent of the EC spirit. Goodwin would later comment that he felt that it was a shame that I couldn't have introduced color overlays onto "a little more worthwhile material." But, like I said, Archie always hated his own work five minutes after he "drewr" it.

While "Elegy" was the key to the sixth issue, it was not alone, even though it ran almost eight pages. Ted White had evolved into a major contributor (much like Ivie in the previous issue), writing an autobiography, a perhaps excessive book and jazz review column, and most importantly the second "E.C. Confidential" segment, this one revealing the true origins of Alfred E. Neuman. Like the story behind Potrzebie, it was yet another scoop, perhaps more significant at the time because EC was planning to continue the mystique of the Neuman character in future *Mad*s and there is the thought that they didn't really want any information leaked out. Goodwin was, as usual, prominent in that issue with (as another change of pace) a cinema review (or, "Movin Pictures An That Stuff"); Ivie continued the "visit to EC" tradition


PAT ARMSTRONG

THE MAD CLUB MELVIN CAPER

The Mad Melvin Club, if it did nothing else, achieved fame as being the
sorriest fan club ever to exist. Founded late in 1952 by three Alexandria followers
of the new EC publication, MAD, this organization struggled through three years of
operation to finally collapse in a heap, having contributed nothing toward the
betterment of mankind.

We had no purpose, which was juet as well for we accomplished nothing in the
end. A letter printed in the sixth MAD calling attention to the club started the
ball rolling. When the club ceased to roll, over 275 people had received member-
ship cards.

Our one moment of glory began on July 11, 1955. It was then that I received
a distance call from a reporter with the Miami Herald. This reporter

#7 15¢

with a four page spread, while also contributing the second, and major, part of "The Search For T.C.K." and a column on comic book history that concentrated on *Superman.*

And there was Ted White's EC Bulletin, which informed the readers of the not unexpected demise of Picto-Fiction and the information that *Shock Illustrated* # 3 could be obtained for fifty cents. To my knowledge, this was the only way that EC fans of that time were made aware of the availability of the last Picto-Fiction that never saw the light of a newsstand. White reported in *Hoohah!* that 200 copies were actually assembled and hand-stapled by the staff in the EC offices, presumably to at least have something to show for the work involved. *Hoohah!* readers had the first crack at those 200 copies . . . at 50¢ a copy. No one knows today how many of those copies still exist, but a few years ago Bill Gaines admitted to me that he had about a dozen copies stashed away. He also admitted that he keeps them in a safe. It has been reliably reported that Russ Cochran was given a copy of *Shock* # 3 by Gaines . . . after fulfilling the condition that he first complete his personal EC collection, including all Pre-Trend issues. He obviously accomplished this presumably expensive goal . . . and thereby saved the 50¢ tab that was forced upon *Hoohah!* readers.

Still, on analysis, *Hoohah!* # 6 had its weaknesses. Movie, jazz and book reviews contributed by several fans didn't really have a place in "The World's Top EC Fanzine." We were filling pages. The very presence of "Elegy" pointed out that there wasn't that much to write about EC anymore. *Hoohah!* had become an outlet for the top fans of the period, but the death of its idol was beginning to catch up with it.

Still, there was time for fan creativity, and just when Ted White assumed I had settled into the peculiar 6 x 9¼ size and went to great pains to mimeograph the six page "Gaines Mutiny Courtroom Scene" as well as a multi-colored cover and back cover in this peculiar size, I naturally changed the magazine to a standard 8½ x 11 format. As with any transition I made, it was a matter of economic necessity. My father's shaky credit line had provided me with a larger mimeograph, while the paper supplier was rapidly losing interest in the variable scratch pad business and paying closer attention to my bills. The only alternative for the future of *Hoohah!* was a new paper supplier, and economics dictated an 8½ x 11 size. Thus, White's elaborately printed cover and back cover ended up hand tipped onto the larger sheets, while the "Gaines Mutiny Courtroom Scene" became an odd-sized insert, as had happened earlier to Ivie's "AARGH!".

Naturally, this didn't set very well with White at the time, for which I can't blame him. But the material was distributed (typically late) as part of *Hoohah!* # 7, and despite the size differences White's contributions were probably the dominant features. Goodwin wrote an autobiography in a humorous vein, perhaps a tongue in cheek shot at White's earlier published biog; particularly since both White and Goodwin included "drawrings" of themselves. And, at least in the case of Archie's copy, it was a subtle takeoff on the EC "Artist Of The Issue" series. Bob Stewart contributed an extensive ten page review of *Mad,* which was possibly inspired by Stark's "Elegy." Larry Ivie contributed yet another study of the *Superman* comics, while Fred von Bernewitz's column, which had been forced out of the sixth issue, was back.

And the letter column included some flattering comments from some guy named John Benson who had just discovered *Hoohah!* and received all the back issues. He seemed particularly enamored over "Elegy" but, again, I suppose that was before he got around to reading the first issue.

Still, it was not the same *Hoohah!*

I suppose anyone with a critical eye could sit down and come up with the same evaluation. But it stands out more to me simply because I typed every letter on every stencil. Except for Ivie and White's pre-printed contributions, I redrew every cartoon and ran every page with tender loving care through one of two different mimeograph machines. And I knew that *Hoohah!* # 7, let alone any subsequent issue, would never rival that sixth issue, which was the culmination of a love affair—not just mine, but everyone who ever contributed to *Hoohah!*

And it was because of this sense of love that *Hoohah!* struggled on with understandable infrequency. Bob Stewart supported issue # 8 with a six page analysis of *Mad,* while Goodwin chipped in with his cleverest front/bacover combination in the form of a satire on the early science fiction pulps.

It was enough to inspire issue # 9, which was actually larger than # 8 (36 pages vs 22). Goodwin came back with another front cover vs back cover story line, and I don't recall a single letter of complaint that the girl on the back was a nude line drawing. Perhaps EC fans, or at least their parents, had grown up. Bob Stewart was still analyzing *Mad,* Ivie struggled in with a piece on the "good old days," and the hard core fans (including Bridwell and Benson) were represented by a special theme issue idea I had devised on the relative merits of Kurtzman vs. Feldstein. It was strictly reader opinions, but it caused more than a small amount of controversy.

And, of course, that's all *Hoohah!* was left with. Controversy, and how to create it. EC had died, and there wasn't really anything to say after "Elegy" was printed. *Hoohah!* was the fanzine that refused to die, in the same sense that EC's readers, including myself, refused to let it go.

Which accounted for *Hoohah!* # 10, a seven pager prompted because of a Fred von Bernewitz trip to EC and an interview with Gaines and Geldstein that boiled down to the fact that they really didn't want to promote an EC fanzine such as *Hoohah!* for the simple reason that it had, indeed, evolved into a forum for criticism. And, of course, a fanzine about *Mad,* last of the EC empire, could not survive without promotion.

Gaines and Feldstein were right, of course. All *Hoohah!* would have become would have been a critical journal, concentrating on what was wrong with the latest issue of a single magazine instead of benefitting from what might have been right when they were publishing the finest comic books that ever found their way to a rack. *Hoohah!* persisted for a period of time, but, like EC, it was doomed to extinction, its writers and artists supporting it to the end much as the EC gang had supported Gaines and Feldstein. And, like EC, *Hoohah!* reached a zenith. It could never be the same again.

Still, it had its value aside from a historical documentation of the EC history. It was a training ground for the fans of that era that would become the professionals of tomorrow. Which, of course, is what the fannish experience is all about. Whether it was a legend or not is a moot point. Personally I think it happened to be the right outlet for creativity at the right time.

Whether it was "the king of them all" is similarly moot. Maybe it was, indeed, the best, simply because it was the last and its contributors gave it everything in their unfounded hope that, somehow, EC might survive. *Hoohah!* became a straw, and we all clutched at it.

But there's one thing I'll always fondly recall from those days of stencilling, mimeographing, stapling and mailing out every copy. And that's the simple fact that everyone involved, whether it was Parker trying to pay his paper bill or Goodwin wondering where his next hot dog was coming from, Kelly stapling *Checklist* ads to telephone poles or Ivie and White wondering why the magazine's size kept changing; we all had one common purpose. And we were fortunate enough to experience EC when it was a living entity, and we had a lot of fun living with it, and a lot of pain dying with it. However briefly, EC was once ours.

And we had fun.

Oh God, how we did have fun . . .

Ron Parker is eminently qualified to write the Hoohah *chapter of "The EC Fanzines" series, having been the editor and publisher of that august publication. Parker's interest in EC and writing later led him to write scripts for the Warren magazines* Creepy *and* Eerie. *He is currently a member of the National Turf Writers Association and is a featured columnist and Contributing Editor for several prominent publications devoted to thoroughbred horse racing. Parker allows that his love affair with EC was rekindled while writing this article, to the extent that he is compiling a* Best of Hoohah! *compendium with supplemental notes that he hopes will be of interest to EC fans.*

THE CAMERA PARTY

TO B.G. WITH LOVE!
A BELATED THANK YOU CARD FROM YOUR GANG!!
HOT DAWG! NOTHIN' LIKE A TELEPHOTO LENS!
WEBSTER
RECORD CHANGER
Loads of thanks Bill
HOLD IT! I'M SHOOTING YOU IN COLOR!
THAT BILL GAINES AND HIS THICK GIFTS! THANX A MILLION, BILL, ANYWAY!
SAVAGE
PRINCETON
RUTGERS
GOSH BILL I CAN'T GET OVER THIS — THANKS A MILLION
WE LOVE YOU TO PIECES JEANIE & BILL ELDER
THANKS FOR SAVIN' ME WORK BILL! NUTS TO YOU!
AL & CLAIRE
THANKS, BILL!
JACK & DENA
I'M USING A 61
I'M USING F 35
USE SECOND GEAR
SLOW
THANX FROM JOE + GLO
MANY MANY THANKS
AT MY DESK DREAMIN OF FUN CAN'T HELP WONDERIN' HOW IT CAN BE DONE???
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, BILL!
PICTURES! PICTURES! STOP RUNNING WE TAKING PICTURES
Harvey and Adele and X
WE WANNA FICKSHA TOO!!!
DEM KITTS!
THIS I OWE TO MY FAMILY??

By the Summer of 1952 the sales figures for EC had really risen and showed every indication of staying that way. To celebrate, Bill Gaines threw a party for his staff and then surprised his guests by handing out some fancy gifts, in most cases camera equipment. Al Feldstein, who was the only person in on the surprise, wanted a power lawnmower, and it was known that Graham Ingels wanted an outboard motor. Gaines once drily described this party as "an early example of what later became known as my 'paternalism.'"

The artists drew a big poster for a thank you note, which Gaines had framed and hung on the wall. If you can't recognize the art and you're wondering who "Ollie & Jack" are, that's John Severin and his girl friend of the time. Gaines does not recall who did the delightful cherub. The Craig, Severin, and Elder drawings are reproduced here full size, the others somewhat smaller.

Illustrations copyright © 1983 William M. Gaines.

HOT DAWG!
NOTHIN' LIKE A TELEPHOTO LENS!
WEBSTER
RECORD CHANGER
Loads of thanks, Bill!
JOHN + TONI
GOSH, BILL! I CAN'T GET OVER THIS ... THANKS A MILLION!
Ollie & Jack

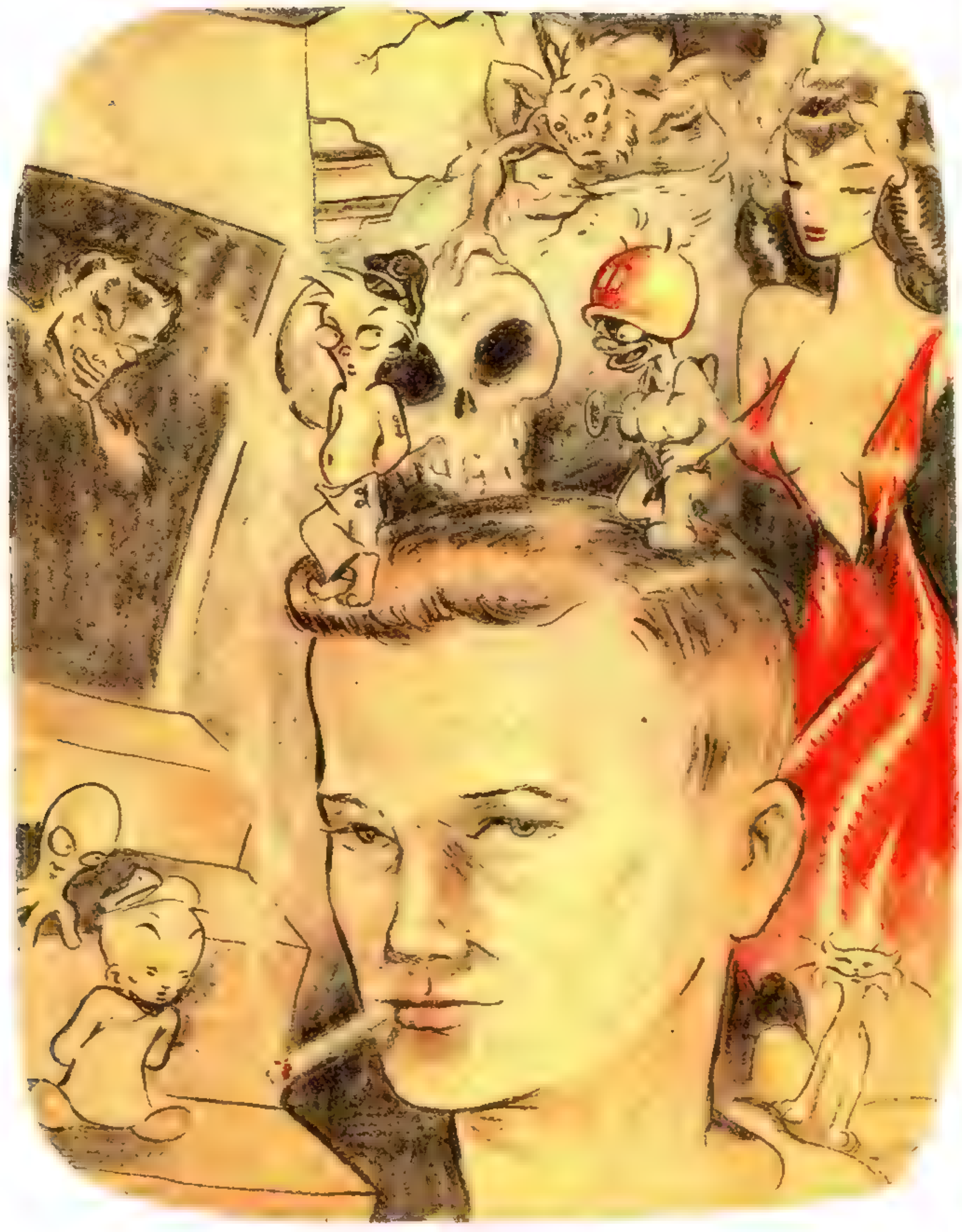
HOLD IT! I'M SHOOTING YOU IN COLOR!
THAT BILL GAINES AND HIS TRICK GIFTS! THANX A MILLION, BILL, ANYWAY!
HARDLY NORMAL
SAVAGE U.
PRINCETON U.
CIVEN TECH.
RUTGERS U.
SUB NOR
$2.00
WE LOVE YOU TO PIECES!
JEANIE & BILL ELDER

LOOK OUT, KIDS! HERE HE COMES AGAIN!
THANKS FOR SAVIN' ME WORK, BILL! YUK! YUK!
AL & CLAIRE
PUTT PUTT
THANKS, BILL!
JACK & DENA
I'M USING A 16.
I'M USING F 3.5!
CAUTIC USE SECONU GEAR
HILL
SLOW
"CLIK!
Thanks, Bill!
THE WOODS

THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, BILL!
PICTURES! PICTURES! STOP FOLLOWING ME TAKING PICTURES!
Harvey and Adele and X

JUS' A LIL' LONGER GLO. OKAY.! OKAY.! HOLD IT.! NOW I GOTTA CHECK MY METER.
AND I END UP WITH A DOUBLE EXPOSURE - @X&~.!G~~XL~...
THANX FROM JOE+GLO

PUTT!! PUTT!!
MANY, MANY THANKS
GRAHAM
GERTRUDE
DEANNA +
ROBIN



EARLY WOOD

Many great cartoonists drew incessantly as children, and Wally Wood belongs to that group. Interestingly, although he wasn't terribly concerned about saving his professional work, and although he gradually shed many of his possessions in his nomadic journeys the last 15 years of his life, he held on to great quantities of his childhood sketches. Why? Many of his earliest themes recurred in his work throughout his career. Was he trying to maintain a link with an adolescent sense of fantasy? The careful selection of the name of one's character, the depiction of oneself in a Caniff styled tropical bar, the obsession with skulls and thrones, the strange flights of imagination—are these horded treasures the key to the work of Wallace Wood?

APRIL

VOL. I NO I

A ____ PUBLICATION

SM ℗ Reg U.S Pat

Dear Public;
Here is a comic we believe is Truly Different! You'll see what we mean..

Editors

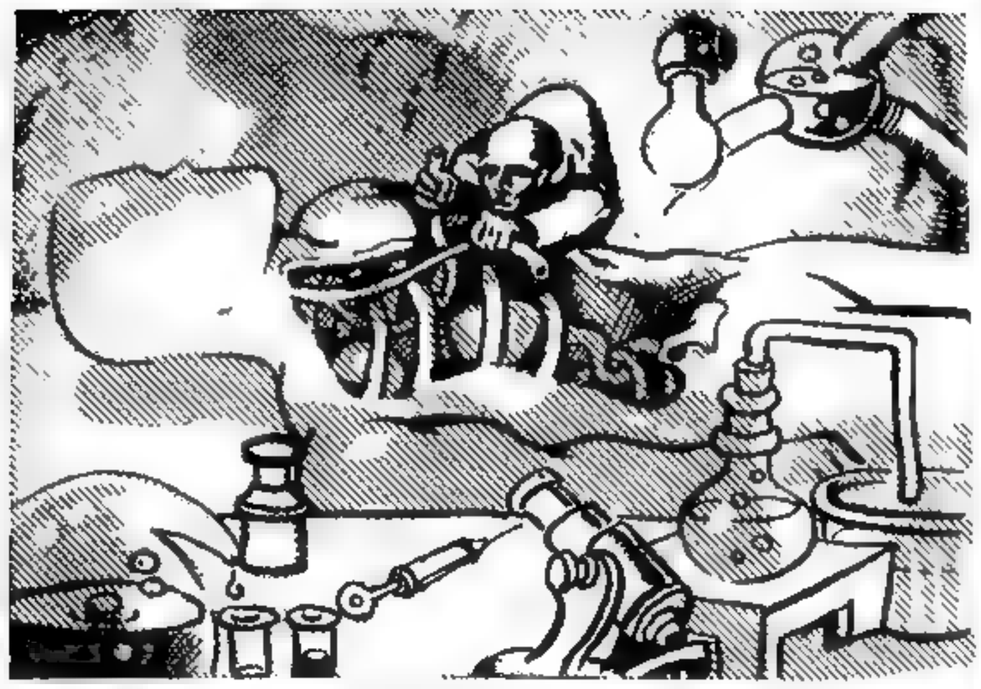
A DIFFERENT ARTIST!

DIFFERENT COMICS

10¢

Wallace Wood
"The Kid Cartoonist"

OUT, LOWLY ONE! WE FATIGUED AND WEARY CREATURES WISH TO BATHE!



Terry York

Justin Blade

Mike Angel

Mike Royer

Clint Banner

Zero Blake

Zip Taraby

Tom Flagg

Jerry May

Wing Barton

Kirk Storm

Wade Barton

[illegible]
Wayne Storm

Hunt Banner

Lance Parker

Vip Barton

Zip Hunter

Pepper Barton

Hunt Swift

Bart Swift

Marty Swift

Carter Swift

Luke Swift

Cord Storm

Cory Mason

Chip Torrent

Terry Ray

Clint Carter

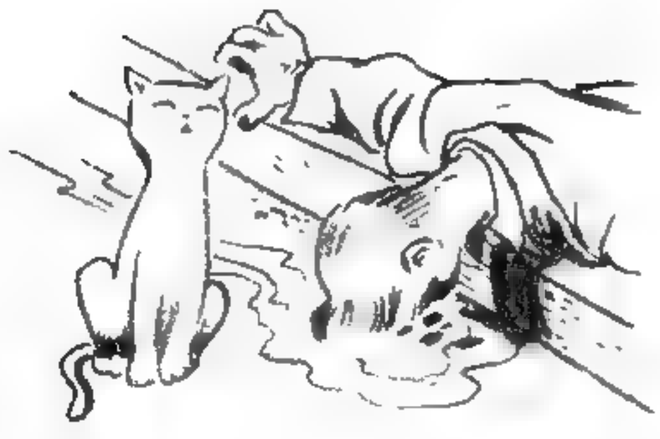
Sky Banner

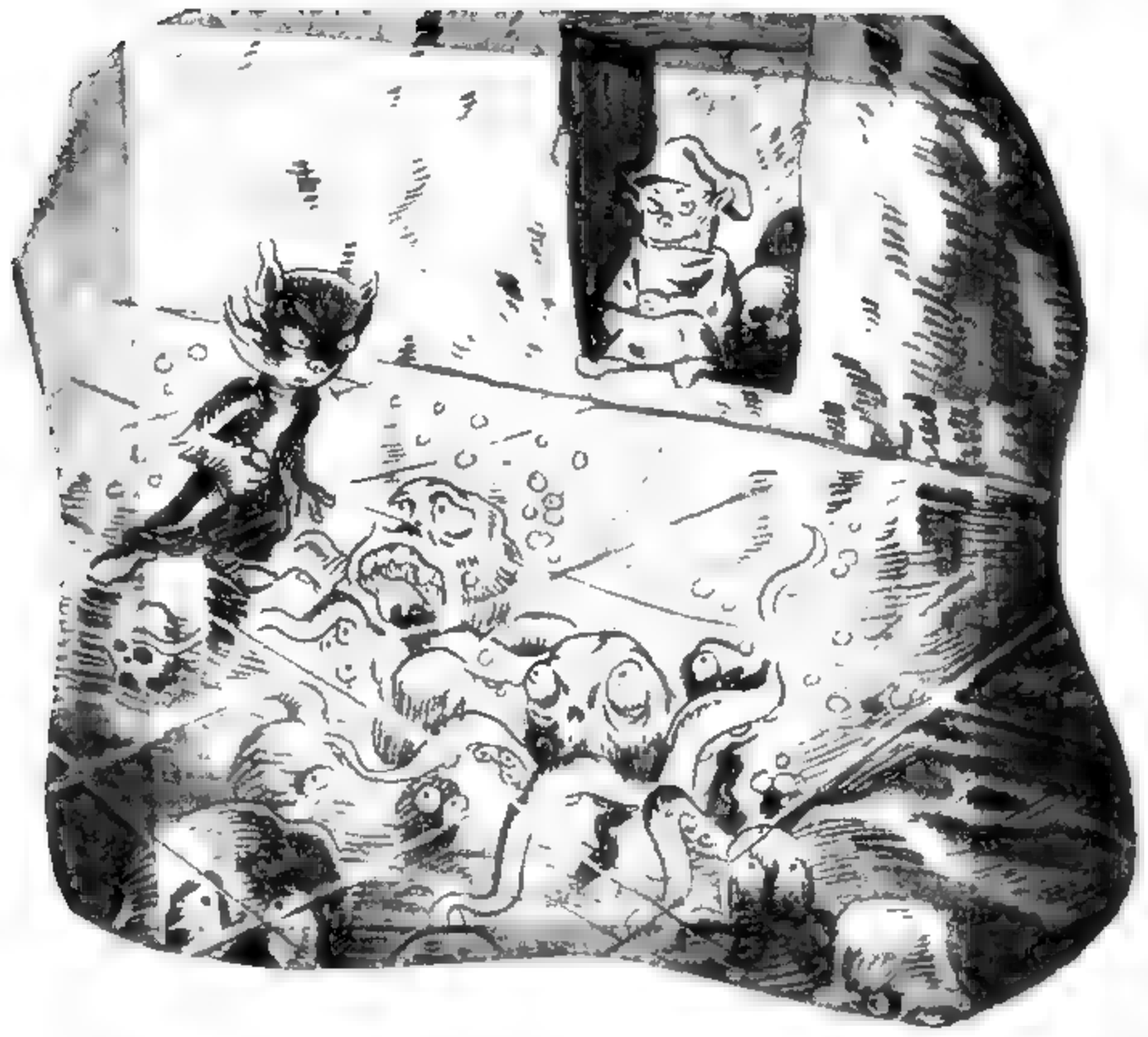
Phil Storm

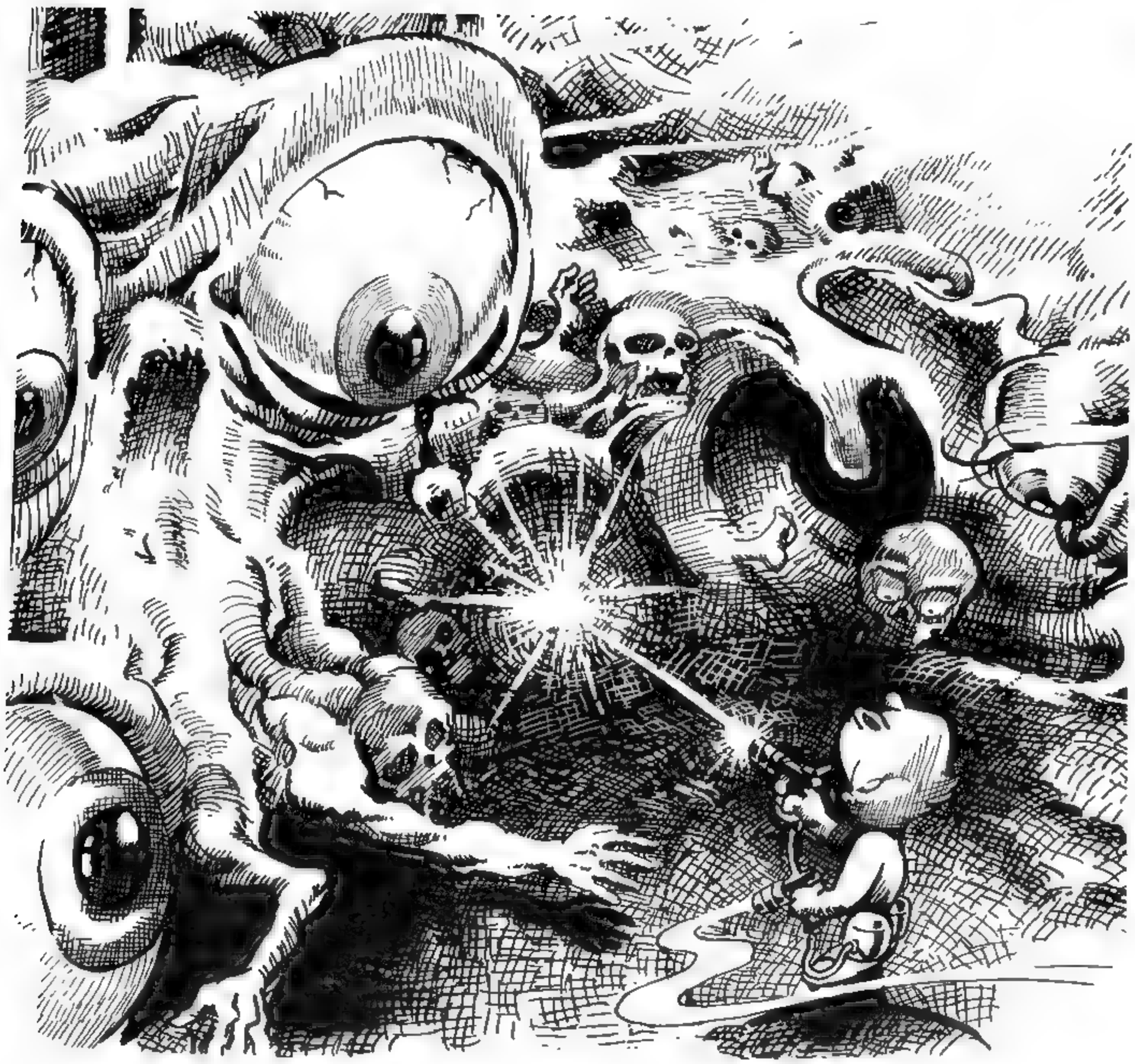
[redacted]

Bick Storm

Dean Mason







Dean Storm

Hunt Storm

Hunt Harper

Hunt Laraby

Johnny Arrow

Bick Foster

Hunt Raymond

Hunt Taylor

~~Barney Swift~~

Barney Swift

Martin Swift

Mark Swift

Tod Garland

Bick Voyage

Mike Blaze

Duke Swift

Terry Justin

Tom Friday

Blaze Storm

Mike Journey

Mike Starr

Barnay Guard

Martin Guard

~~Barney Future (terrible)~~

Blaze Barton

Blaze Harper

Barney Steel

Terry Steel

Dean Travel

Duke Travel

Hale Banner

Hale Raymond

Hale Barton

Mike Vision

Flight Barton

Flight Carter

Mark Flight

Matt Flight

Mike Gunn

Mike Target

Mike Blaze

Clint Blazer

Mike Power

Terry Crater

Duke Craker

Mike Crater

Kirk Crater

Van Garde
In Outer Space

Chip Crater

Vance Garde

Brett Banner

Brett Crater

Brett Storm

Brett Blaze

Brett Journey

Mike Mariner

Duke Mariner

Duke Voyage

Bart Voyage

Matt Voyage

[redacted]

SKY BARTON

SKY!

BAT BANNER

TRIP BANNER

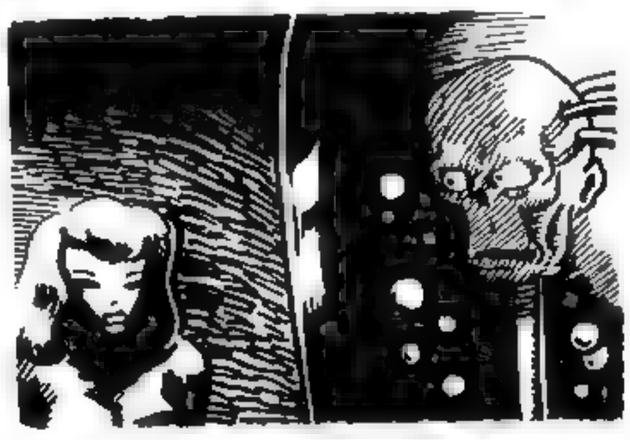
FLIP BANNER

TY BANNER

The ant men brought out the "Cat-Tank"

TALES OF THE HEADS

AGAIN WE RETURN TO THE GLOOMY, VAST LABORATORY WHEREIN DWELL THE HEADS, THOSE ANCIENT, ONCE LIVING HUMAN HEADS.. AND TO THEIR TALES..



THEIR ONLY WAY OF ESCAPE IS THROUGH TELLING THE STORIES OF THEIR LIVES.. -AND DEATHS! -AND IF THEY LIE WHO CAN TELL?

THE EC WRITERS

Collect all the known data about the writers of EC's New Trend and New Direction comics into one feature—it sounded like an easy way to fill a few pages! But as each bit of information came to light it seemed to lead on to another new detail or source, and finally tracking down all the leads became an obsession—a very time consuming one that has caused this feature to take almost as much time as all the others in this issue put together.

It was inevitable that contacts with failing memories would respond with the query, "Why don't you ask EC?" Well, of course that's the first place I went, but it isn't that easy. For one thing, Bill Gaines's financial records for that period, including payments to writers, were destroyed many years ago by a thief-turned-vandal (see chapter 11 of Frank Jacobs' The Mad World of William M. Gaines *for details). The idea of asking Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein which stories they wrote (or even, god forbid, who wrote which of the other stories) is one that has great appeal to fans. But the fact is that if you wrote five or six hundred stories in the early fifties, you just* don't remember *much about them in the early eighties, especially if your career in between was successful and interesting (and not that closely related). And you really can't take weeks or months off from that career to read through all those stories to try to figure out that perhaps you did or didn't write this or that particular story. (All this makes perfect sense to* me, *but I'm spelling it out to answer inevitable readers' questions.)*

However—amazingly—some writers have saved their records from that distant time, and some of the others had a crystal clear memory of the (usually few) stories that they wrote for EC.

As you can see, some of the sources of information conflicted with each other, sometimes in puzzling ways. I have tried to indicate the source and reliability of the information whenever there's any question as to its probability "beyond a reasonable doubt." I'm certain that the rest of it is quite accurate on the whole, but no one piece of information should be considered infallible!

—John Benson

(Note: both the Feldstein interview and the Wessler article were completed and typeset before most of the research on the other EC writers took place. This has resulted in some inconsistencies between these features and the following article, in the form of an ignorance on the part of the interviewer in the Feldstein piece, and perhaps some mistaken general statements made in the Wessler piece. This is the last feature in the issue to be typeset. So much data has been gathered that we're forced to use 6 point type to fit the already allotted three pages. Sorry!]

ROBERT BERNSTEIN was, according to Ted White (*Hoohah* # 4, 1956), "the script writer for 'Mark Stone' in *Psychoanalysis*, and in actuality *is* Mark Stone in all but name—Stone's troubles were and are his." It may be well to note here that early fanzines are not always a totally reliable source of information. For example, Ted's last statement sounds like an amplification of someone's casual remarks about some similarities between Bernstein and the character he created. One may suppose that Bernstein was neither quite the financial success nor the psychiatric wreck that Stone was, although the Stone sessions do have a certain authentic ring to them. Ted White also states in his article that the Comics Code Authority did not allow reference to the fact that Stone was a Jew, although that had been established in the first—pre-Code—issue as a significant part of his problem.

Bernstein also wrote one of the *Psychoanalysis*-style stories in *Shock Illustrated* # 1, but if he wrote anything other than the Mark Stone segments for EC's color comics, evidence of it hasn't survived. Bernstein was a veteran comic book writer; his work first appeared in the early forties, and he worked for Marvel as late as 1972.

OTTO BINDER represents the most puzzling anomaly uncovered in the research for this article. Both Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein, who have readily given credit to the other writers listed here, have no recollection at all of Otto Binder having any association with EC other than authorizing their adaptations of four of his stories in *Weird Science-Fantasy*—and Feldstein remembers doing the adaptations for those himself. (The stories appeared with credit to Binder's pen name Eando Binder, which had originally been used for collaborations between the brothers *Earl and Otto*.) Jim Steranko's attribution to Binder of "more than 25 script contributions to EC during a two-year span" in his *History of Comics* was met with skepticism by both Gaines and Feldstein when it was pointed out to them, especially the patently ridiculous claim that Binder wrote for *Mad* comics.

Efforts on a number of fronts to unearth an actual listing of Binder's comic book scripts, known to have existed, were a failure for some time. But then comics historian Jerry Bails—who has extensive data on hundreds, if not thousands, of comics creators—discovered in going through his files that he indeed *did* have Otto Binder's work records, sent to him many years ago by Binder before his death in 1975. Actually there are two lists, in different formats. One lists his science fiction stories, with the magazine titles and issue numbers they appeared in. The other is from a payment record, listing story titles, dates sold and genres (but not magazine title or issue number), grouped by publisher. The two are in agreement with each other for the few EC science fiction stories listed, except that the former lists a text story, "Hello? Hello?", *Weird Science-Fantasy* # 27, which is not in the payment record.

The payment record clears up the mystery of Binder's supposed contribution to *Mad*. Three items are listed as being sold in May 1954 to "Mad Pubs." (all other listings are to "EC"): "Pandora's Box," "Badman Hunt," and "Captain Marvel Flies Again." Now these bear no relationship to anything that ever appeared in *Mad*, but a story titled "Captain Marble Flies Again" *did* appear in Premier Magazines' *Nuts* # 5, November 1954! The other two scripts were probably sold to the same publisher but never used, since # 5 was the last issue of *Nuts*.

However, the listings raised another problem—they showed that Binder, a well known science fiction novelist and pulp writer, wrote 12 horror stories, six *Crime/Shock* stories, but only *three* science fiction stories for EC (not counting the adaptations or the text). Assigning these horror stories to Binder leaves only about six stories that weren't written by either Binder, Wessler, Craig or Feldstein in the last five issues of the horror comics (and possibly another half dozen stories in the issues immediately before those issues)—very few horror stories for Jack Oleck to have written. And since Gaines clearly recalls Oleck as one of the primary outside horror writers, he remains somewhat skeptical that Binder contributed 23 stories to EC. (See the Oleck listing for more details.)

The conflict between the unearthed data and Gaines' and Feldstein's recollections can not really be resolved. It is difficult (for me and for them) to believe that Binder could have contributed so many scripts without their recollecting it today. This must always cast some doubt as to the veracity of the listing below.

But if the list isn't real, it must be a fake, and that's even harder to believe. For one thing, Wessler wrote so many scripts—and no one knew which were his until I made a thorough analysis of the raw data he extracted from his files over the last year—that if someone made a list at random they'd be bound to hit a Wessler story by accident. Who'd dare to list all four stories in *Haunt of Fear* # 26, and know not to list any in # 28, where Wessler wrote them all? Then there's the fact that Binder's list is in sale date order. Binder's two New Direction stories show an unusually long lead time of about a year. This phenomenon is also found in Wessler's records. Apparently that was one time where EC was building up an inventory of scripts.

Binder's own comments about working for EC, as quoted from several sources by Bhob Stewart in his notes for Cochran's EC Library edition of *Weird Science-Fantasy*, are another convincing piece of evidence.

So, unless more information comes along, we'll call the following list very probable but not definitive. Since Binder's list gives only story title and date, there is the possibility of misidentification, since EC did change writers' titles, and in some cases used similar titles several times. For example, Binder's "Only Sin Deep" could conceivably be "Only Skin-Deep," *Shock SuspenStories* # 13, though the time frame makes the story listed below far more likely. Where Binder's title differs from the story that I believe it represents, I have listed Binder's title in brackets after the EC title.

Crime SuspenStories
- 23 This'll Kill You
  Standing Room Only
- 25 Three for the Money

The Haunt of Fear
- 24 Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes . . . Only Sin Deep
- 25 The New Arrival
  The Light in his Life
- 26 Marriage Vow
  The Shadow Knows
  Spoiled
  Comes the Dawn [Came the Dawn]

Impact
- 3 Totally Blind [Blind Love]

Shock SuspenStories
- 14 You, Murderer
- 15 Raw Deal
  For Cryin' Out Loud

Tales from the Crypt
- 41 Operation Friendship
- 43 Four-Way Split
  Clots My Line

Valor
- 3 The Pyramid [Pyramids Apart]

The Vault of Horror
- 37 Oh! Henry

Weird Science-Fantasy
- 27 Adaptability [Adaptable]
  Close Shave
- 28 Lost in Space

RAY BRADBURY didn't write any scripts for EC, but he did allow them to adapt 24 of his previously published stories to the comics form. (This isn't counting "Home to Stay," *Weird Fantasy* # 13, and EC's other unauthorized, uncredited use of his work.) The adaptations were by Feldstein, with the exception of "Touch and Go," *Crime SuspenStories* # 17, which was by Craig. The story of how these adaptations came about has been told several times; it's covered pretty thoroughly in the EC Convention transcripts in *Squa Tront* # 8. The authorized stories are prominently credited in the issues in which they appear.

JOHNNY CRAIG recently looked over every story he illustrated in an attempt to determine which ones he had written. Naturally the stories seemed familiar to him by virtue of the fact that he had illustrated them, so in

some cases he wasn't certain. However, with the few exceptions herewith listed, Craig was reasonably sure that he wrote every New Trend and New Direction story that he illustrated. The exceptions are (the author is indicated in parentheses): "Any Sport in a Storm," *Vault of Horror* # 38 (Wessler); "Deadly Beloved," *Vault of Horror* # 39 (Wessler); "Fed Up," *Haunt of Fear* # 13 (Feldstein?); "Lost Battalion," *Two-Fisted Tales* # 32 (Kurtzman); "Fall Guy for Murder," *Crime SuspenStories* # 18 (Feldstein); "Bats in my Belfry," *3-D* # 2 (Feldstein?).

Craig also wrote three stories for other artists: "Shoe-Button Eyes" for Ingels in *Vault of Horror* # 35, and "Witch Witch's Witch" for Davis and "Pipe Dream" for Krigstein, both in *Vault of Horror* # 36.

JACK DAVIS wrote the following stories for EC:

Frontline Combat
14 Whupped
15 Vengeful Sioux
Haunt of Fear
23 Country Clubbing
Two-Fisted Tales
34 Betsy
40 The Last of the Mohicans (probably did adaptation)

COLIN DAWKINS only wrote a few comic book stories in his spare time while pursuing a career with J. Walter Thompson, the advertising firm. All of his stories were in one way or another done for his close friend John Severin, though a few wound up being illustrated by other artists. In addition to his work for EC, Dawkins wrote for Severin's "American Eagle" series at *Prize Comics Western*. Sometimes he would talk out stories with Severin before sitting down to write them. This is his total EC output:

Extra
1 Camera
2 Stromboli
Two-Fisted Tales
36 through 39 *All stories, including texts.*

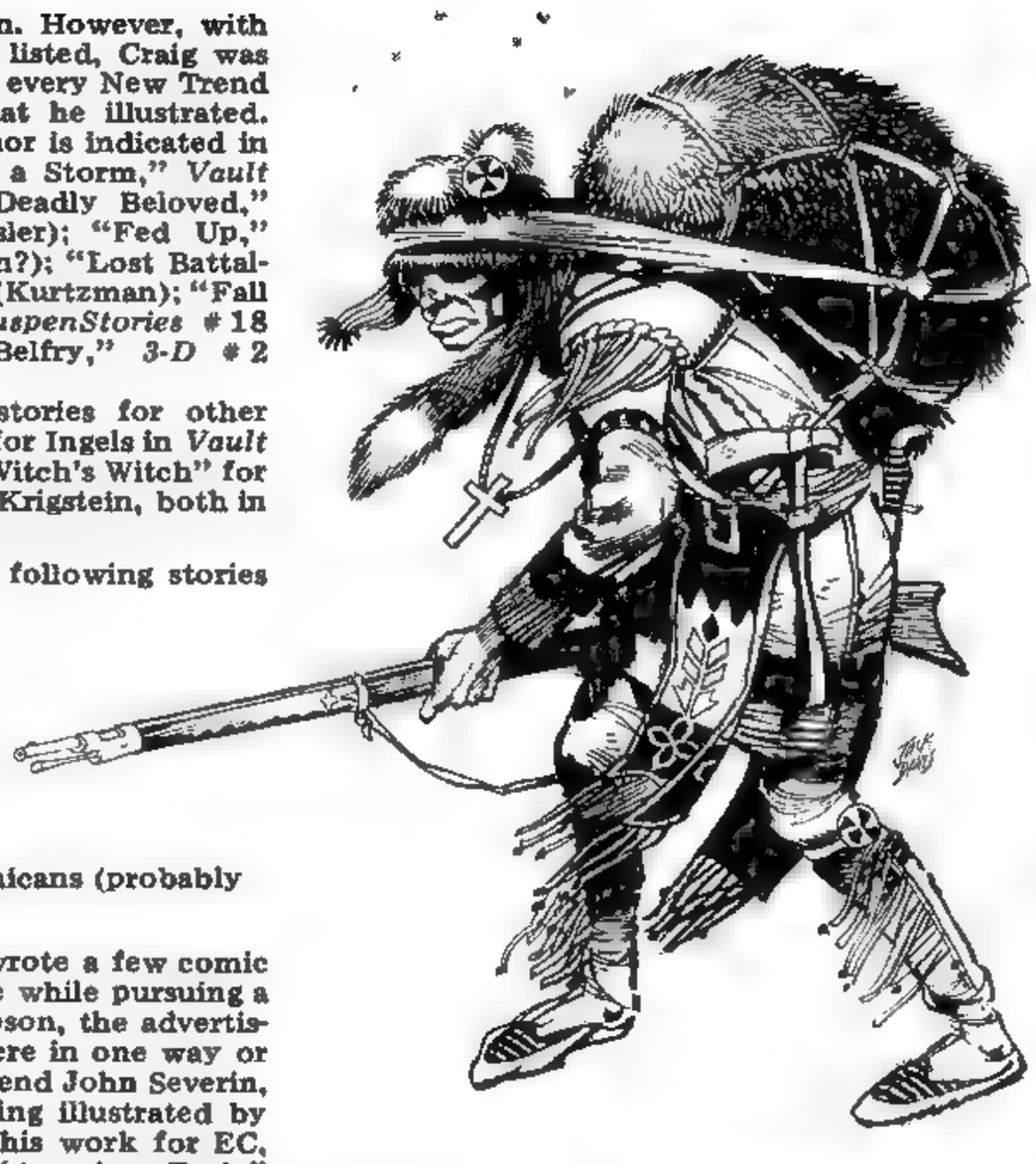
JERRY DE FUCCIO functioned primarily as an assistant to Harvey Kurtzman at EC, which included writing the texts for Kurtzman's books. At a certain point, however, he wrote texts for the entire EC line. According to his recollection he wrote the texts for these issues (both texts when there were two): *Two-Fisted Tales* 21-25, 27, 28, 30-35, 40, 41; *Frontline Combat* 1-6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14; *Mad* 1-6; *Vault of Horror* 28, 29; *Tales from the Crypt* 33-35; *Haunt of Fear* 7, 15, 16; *Weird Science* 9, 16-19; *Weird Fantasy* 16-18; *Crime SuspenStories* 14-16, 18; *Shock SuspenStories* 6, 7. De Fuccio also notes that Kurtzman let him write the third page of "Grant" in *Two-Fisted Tales* # 31. De Fuccio wrote the following full-length scripts for EC:

Frontline Combat
13 War Dance
Wolf
15 Belts N' Celts
Two-Fisted Tales
32 Silent Service
33 Outpost
Pearl Divers
34 Trial by Arms (collaboration with Wood)
En Crapaudine
41 Carl Akeley

BILL ELDER's contributions to EC as a writer or story man are a little fuzzy due to the failing memories of all involved. Elder does state elsewhere in this issue that he wrote a few of the stories he illustrated for *Panic*. Two scripts that he tentatively identified as perhaps being his are "Smiddy" in # 4 and "Tick Dracy" in # 5.

The title character in "Mole," *Mad* # 2, was an Elder creation—"something I'd played with for years"—though obviously inspired by Chester Gould's villain. How much, if anything, he contributed to the storyline beyond the character is something the principals can no longer remember. Kurtzman wrote the actual script, of course.

Bill Gaines reports that it was Elder's idea to do the "Special Art Issue" of *Mad*, # 22, which recounts Elder's life story. According to Gaines, the only time he ever saw Kurtzman and Elder in a serious disagreement was when it came time to split the payment for that issue. Certainly it wasn't an issue that could be split into "art" and "script" in the normal fashion, and whether Elder felt that he had contributed to the writing or Kurtzman had worked on the mechanicals and felt that he had contributed to the art Gaines no longer remembers. He does remember paying out more than the regular *Mad* budget that particular issue in order to keep the peace.



HARLAN ELLISON's sole EC contribution was one of his first sales. He submitted the story in prose form; EC paid him for the plot and Feldstein adapted it to the comics format. The full details, including Ellison's re-use of the story over the years, are recounted in Bhob Stewart's notes for Cochran's EC Library edition of *Weird Science-Fantasy*.

Weird Science-Fantasy
24 Upheaval (plot)

GEORGE EVANS wrote the following (his only EC scripts):

Frontline Combat
15 McCudden
Two-Fisted Tales
40 Flaming Coffins
41 Yellow

AL FELDSTEIN scripted more stories for EC than any other writer. Though less than half the total EC output is his (about 45%, in fact), he wrote just about all the stories that are generally thought of as being the core of the EC mystique—namely the horror, crime and science fiction stories with cover dates from mid-1951 through the early months of 1954. Prior to that time he was kept too busy as an artist to write more than the stories he illustrated. After that period most of the stories were written by outside writers, though as editor, through story conferences and editing of scripts, he still exerted a strong influence on the stories. So far as is known, he wrote all the stories he illustrated.

With rare exceptions, the scripts Feldstein wrote were co-plotted with Bill Gaines. Two such exceptions, written by Feldstein alone, are "Gone . . . Fishing" (*Vault of Horror* # 22) and "My World" (*Weird Science* # 22).

GARDNER FOX, a prolific novelist in many genres and a contributor to the pulps, also found time to write, by his count, well over 4,000 comic scripts. The majority of his output was for DC, but he also worked for other companies. For instance, he wrote "a whole heap of stuff" for Max Gaines, including, he says, all of *International Comics*. It also appears, from the comics that Fox donated from his collection to the University of Oregon, that he wrote regularly for *Gunfighter*, *Moon Girl* and *Saddle Romances*. When Max Gaines died, he continued with EC (possibly after a brief hiatus), writing about 18 stories for Bill Gaines, mostly for the New Trend titles.

Fox still has his payment records, although not his original scripts. Fortunately EC changed few of the story titles, and Fox's records show the date of sale (which dates the stories fairly exactly, since EC never maintained a backlog until the New Direction series). It's therefore possible to make a reasonably accurate list of his stories for Gaines.

Actually, most of the title changes are pretty easy to figure out if one compares his title to the printed stories. For example, Fox's title "They Called Me . . . Beast," by the title alone, doesn't match that closely to "The Werewolf Legend": but if one reads the latter story in the comic, one notices that the pre-title text would read better with Fox's title, and that the lead character refers to himself more often as a "beast" than a werewolf.

Two of Fox's titles that were apparently changed are sufficiently vague that they could fit several EC stories. One, "Beauty and the Beast," which could actually be either a horror or a love story, would have appeared in an issue with a cover date of approximately March or April 1950 (possibly later or not at all if a love story). The other, "An Ancient Sorcery," would have had a cover date of approximately September or October 1950.

The payment record shows that he wrote text stories, two in each issue, for *The Haunt of Fear* # 16 [2] and *Weird Science* # 12 [1] (assuming that his "Moon Murder" is the same as EC's "By the Dark of the Moon").

One rather strange anomaly in Fox's records is that three stories on Fox's list show that he was paid for a different story length than the length the story was when it actually appeared. The same is true for a fourth story that had a minor title change. This is very puzzling because the possible explanations—that EC rewrote the stories to a different length than submitted, that they changed the title on his story and then used his title on someone else's story (which admittedly happened once several years later to a Wessler script; but *three* times?), or that Fox recorded several payments incorrectly in his book—all these seem very remote. In those early days of the New Trend, EC was just not making that many changes to scripts or titles. The four stories in question have been asterisked in the list below.

I have deviated from the stated scope of just New Trend/New Direction stories, and have included Fox's love scripts in the listing below. My justification is that, even though they appeared in pre-Trend titles, the stories listed appeared concurrently on the stands with the early New Trend issues. Where Fox's title differs from the story that I believe it represents, I have listed Fox's title in brackets after the EC title.

The Crypt of Terror
17 The Man Who Was Death*
19 The Hungry Grave
The Haunt of Fear
15 [1] The Mad Magician
16 [2] The Killer in the Coffin
17 [3] Monster Maker [The Man Who Created Life] *
4 The Man from the Grave [Painter from the Grave]
Modern Love
6 Career Girl*
7 A Lesson in Love
8 I Had Two Husbands
A Moon ... A Girl ... Romance
12 Not Worthy of Love*
The Vault of Horror
12 The Werewolf Legend [They Called Me ... Beast]
14 Rats Have Sharp Teeth [Revenge of the Rats]
Weird Fantasy
14 [2] The Trap of Time
15 [3] I Died Tomorrow [Man Who Died Tomorrow]

BILL GAINES wrote no stories on his own, but co-plotted virtually all the stories that Al

Feldstein scripted. He also assisted Johnny Craig with plotting, and participated in story sessions with outside writers.

HARRY HARRISON, who became a well known science fiction writer after abandoning his career as a comic book artist in the fifties, is popularly thought to have written the science fiction stories that he illustrated for EC. This, it turns out, is probably not true. In an interview in *Graphic Story Magazine* #15, Summer 1973, Harrison does tell how he and Wally Wood pushed Bill Gaines into publishing science fiction comics, though he says that he didn't have much to do with the format that Gaines decided on. He also describes selling scripts to EC by having his wife Evelyn turn them in as her own (why he did this isn't clear—apparently he thought that EC wanted the art and writing separate as some other publishers did). Since the scripts were handed in separately from the art, there's no particular reason to believe that Harrison illustrated the scripts that he wrote. Furthermore, today Harrison says that "most of [my EC] scripts were romances, and western romances—perhaps horror, but again the memory fails."

So here's another case where a poor memory is the only source of data—but on that basis it's not even certain that Harrison wrote for the New Trends, let alone for the science fiction titles.

DAN KEYES wrote four stories for *Shock Illustrated* under the pen names A.D. Locke and Kris Daniels, but whether he contributed to the EC color comics is problematic. Ted White wrote that Keyes "scripted all but 'Mark Stone' for *Psychoanalysis*" in his article "Why Picto-Fiction?" in *Hoohah* # 4, written within the year that *Psychoanalysis* appeared. On the other hand, Keyes (who recalls that he wrote the stories for *Shock Illustrated* because of his interest in psychology) recently reviewed *Psychoanalysis* and stated that he did *not* write anything for that title. Ted, in his same article, also said that Keyes wrote all of *Confessions Illustrated*, yet Keyes today feels just as certain that he wrote none of it.

Keyes did write for comics, producing a large number of scripts for the Timely/Atlas horror, fantasy and science fiction titles between 1952 and 1955. One of the most delightfully bizarre tales to appear in those books, the Basil Wolverton illustrated "One of Our Graveyards is Missing" (*Journey into Unknown Worlds* # 14), was written by Keyes. The denouement shows the caretaker standing in the middle of his graveyard—a giant clump of earth floating in space—screaming, "Now the *town* is gone!!" One can almost imagine Keyes saying to himself, "So they want weird stories? They'll get them!" Keyes' comics writing followed naturally from his transfer to the post of Stan Lee's associate editor when Martin Goodman closed down his pulp titles; prior to that time Keyes had been editor of *Marvel Science Fiction*.

Keyes has written short fiction and several novels, both science fiction and mainstream, the most recent being *The Minds of Billy Milligan* in 1981. However, he is best known as the author of *Flowers for Algernon*, which won a Hugo for best short story in 1959, a Nebula award for his novel version in 1966, and was made into the film *Charly*, with Cliff Robertson and Claire Bloom, in 1968.

IVAN KLAPPER was a staff editor at EC during the pre-Trend days. Both Klapper and Bill Gaines seem to think that Klapper wrote a few of the earliest New Trend scripts. There is no question that he wrote many of the early crime and horror text fillers.

HARVEY KURTZMAN wrote all of the stories in *Mad* comics, *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* through # 35, except for those identified elsewhere in this feature as being by other authors. He wrote all the stories that he illustrated for the other EC titles, except for a few of the earliest ones. Two that he did *not* write are "Lost in the Microcosm," *Weird Science* # 12 [1] and "Horror in the Night," *Vault of Horror* # 12.

NICK MEGLIN wrote several comic book scripts in his youth. A few were for editor Harry Harrison at *Masked Ranger Comics*, including a Wyatt Earp tale illustrated by George Woodbridge. Another of his scripts, with a Roman setting, was intended for *Valor* but was never used due to EC's sudden demise. He did sell EC four or five story ideas for

MESSALINA

Panic, however. These are the ones he can recall:

Panic
- 5 Tick Dracy (idea)
- 6 Comic Strip Ads (idea)
- 12 The Heartaches of Joliet's Groans (idea)

JACK MENDELSON was a veteran writer of funny comic books for many companies before coming to EC. Later he had his own Sunday newspaper strip *Jacky's Diary* and was a writer for Jay Ward's TV cartoons and for the film feature *The Yellow Submarine*. Regarding his stories for *Panic*, he notes, "as an incidental footnote, I wrote many of the background signs, posters and other such throw-away gags in the stories of mine that were illustrated by the fantastic Bill Elder; not that he needed me to do it—I was just inspired by him." Mendelson's EC credits are:

Panic
- 7 through 11 *All stories, except texts.*
- 12 Charlie Chinless

JACK OLECK may have been one of EC's more prolific "outside writers," though he probably didn't match Carl Wessler's nearly 100 EC scripts. Unfortunately Oleck didn't keep his old records, so his specific stories can't be identified. Oleck wanted to help in reconstructing such a list from memory, but poor health, which led to his untimely death on March 12, 1981, made that impossible. Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein have both on several occasions cited Oleck as one of the primary outside writers for EC's horror titles. However, Oleck recalled that he generally avoided writing horror stories because of the bad press they had at the time. This might be discounted as the wishful recollection of someone who still had qualms about horror; but if the Otto Binder listing above is indeed correct then there aren't many horror stories that Oleck could have written. Let's make the reasonably safe assumption that there aren't any still unidentified horror/crime story writers lurking in obscurity—in that case Oleck probably wrote between six to ten EC horror stories and about ten to fifteen *Crime/Shock* stories.

Oleck was, however, apparently a heavy contributor to the New Direction titles. *M.D.* and *Piracy* were, in fact, the only two genres he could specifically remember when it came to his contributions to EC. George Evans believes that some of the scripts he illustrated for *Aces High* were written by Oleck. And—if we may cite his article in *Hoohah* # 4 one more time—according to Ted White, Oleck wrote all of the four issues of *Incredible Science Fiction*.

Oleck, a veteran comic book writer for many years, also wrote several novels. His tale of ancient Rome, *Messalina*, written in the late fifties, featured a Roy Krenkel dust jacket. Also relevant to EC was Oleck's paperback tie-in for the movie *Tales from the Crypt*. His most recent novel, *The Villagers*, was published by Lyle Stuart.

JOHN PUTNAM, *Mad* magazine's art director until his death in November 1980, wrote one EC story:

Two-Fisted Tales
- 40 Dien Bien Phu

JOHN SEVERIN would often talk over stories with his pal Colin Dawkins before Dawkins wrote them out. Two such stories in which Severin had a major input were "Justice" (*Two-Fisted Tales* # 36) and "Warrior" (*Two-Fisted Tales* # 37). On his own he wrote:

Two-Fisted Tales
- 41 Code of Honor

EILEEN TOOMEY, a friend of Marie Severin's in the fifties, wrote one story for EC. Marie recollects that it was the one listed below (although it could just possibly have been the other Reed Crandall-illustrated crusades story in *Valor* # 4), and that Johnny Craig had to do a little reworking of the script because Toomey was unfamiliar with comics writing. The script was already in on the other crusades story when Toomey delivered hers; usually EC was quite careful to avoid using similar stories in close succession, but in this case they decided to go ahead with both of them.

Valor
- 3 Debt of Honor

IRVING WERSTEIN wrote scripts for the New Direction comics (and just possibly a few for the New Trend titles). He was a veteran writer of comics and children's books and (according to Gaines) was a novelist. He died in 1971.

CARL WESSLER wrote nearly 100 stories for EC, which may make him their most prolific non-editor writer. See the separate article starting on the next page for details.

WALLY WOOD, who wrote so much of the comics material that he drew in later years, contributed only the following scripts to EC, so far as is known:

Frontline Combat
- 15 Perimeter

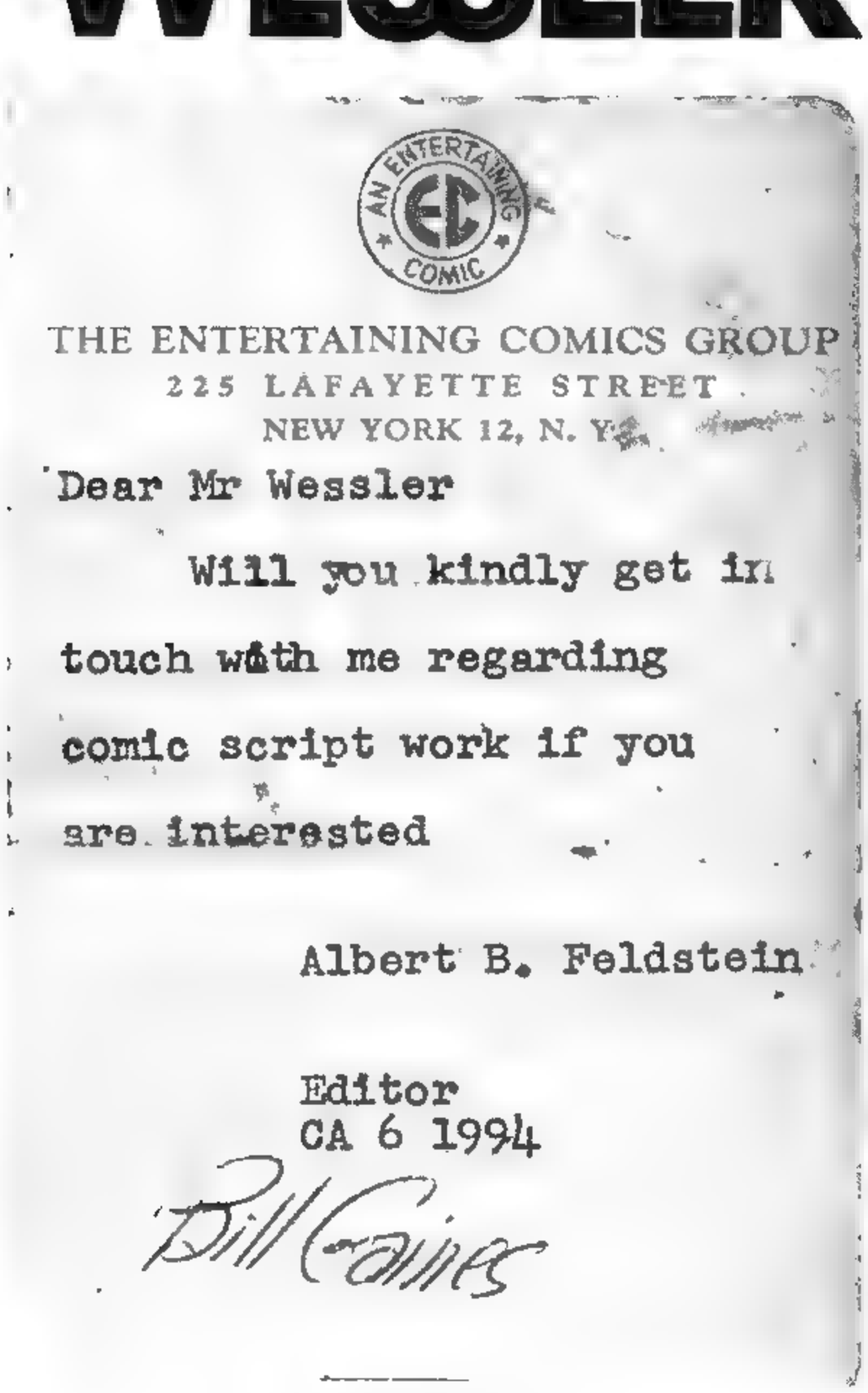
Two-Fisted Tales
- 18 Revolution
- 34 Trial by Arms (collaboration with De Fuccio)

Weird Fantasy
- 15 [3] Dark Side of the Moon
- 17 [5] Deadlock (plotted, probably scripted)
- 18 [6] Rescued (plotted only)
- 8 The Enemies of the Colony

FAILED LEADS. Although William Woolfolk was a prolific writer of comics and a lifelong friend of Bill Gaines, apparently he never wrote for EC's New Trend or New Direction comics. There is also no evidence that John Larner, who had five stories published in the Picto-Fiction titles, or Richard Smith, who had one, ever wrote for EC's comics. The names of Edmond Hamilton and Sheldon Mayer were mentioned by someone as possibilities, but so far as can be determined, neither one wrote for the New Trend or New Direction books.

Harry Harrison, in *Graphic Story Magazine* # 15, says, "I had Jules Feiffer pencil one or two [EC] stories for me which I inked. 'Werewolf' in *Vault of Horror* [# 14] was one, I think. He might also have written it, I don't remember for sure." It's true that the story's unusual first page and splash-at-the-end suggests an Eisner-influenced Feiffer, but when questioned recently, Feiffer felt that it was highly unlikely that he had worked on this or any other EC stories in any capacity. Yet another time that conflicting memories have stymied the intrepid researcher!

CARL WESSLER



AN EC WRITER REVEALED

On October 1, 1953, Al Feldstein sent a 2¢ postcard to veteran comic book writer Carl Wessler, asking him if he'd like to write comic scripts for EC; 13 days later Wessler mailed out his first EC script. Over the next 16 months he sold nearly 100 scripts to EC, about 60 of which were for the crime and horror titles. Wessler wrote the memorable "About Face" for Graham Ingels, the controversial *Shock* stories "A Kind of Justice" and "The Pen is Mightier," and many of the Bernie Krigstein classics, such as "The Catacombs," "In the Bag" and "Murder Dream." In fact, he wrote half a dozen *whole* issues of several New Trend titles.

When Wessler arrived on the EC scene Feldstein and Gaines had already written most of their best stories. For several years they had worked at perfecting the telling of a certain type of horror story, and, having perfected it, they began to repeat familiar house plots. Wessler and Jack Oleck were brought in to supply EC with fresh blood. Wessler was a great idea man, and if he dealt with familiar EC themes, he also brought a wide variety of new story concepts, to the New Direction stories as well as the New Trend. Plot ideas flowed from his brain at an amazing pace, a prime requisite in comics, where volume is a must. Because, even though he was averaging two scripts a week for them at the peak, EC was just one of his accounts during that period.

Nevertheless, Wessler says, "Working with Bill and Al was the happiest time of my comics writing career." Many of the final stories show considerable changes from his original synopses, evidencing quite a bit of work in shaping the story. Some of these changes took place during story conferences, while others were undoubtedly worked out by Wessler as he shaped the final script. In either case, the changes and improvements as the story evolved show a care on the part of Wessler and his editors that was rare in the comics field at the time.

Who is Carl Wessler? Writers of comics since the sixties have generally been credited, but one sometimes wonders who wrote the thousands and thousands of uncredited comic stories that appeared over the years prior to that time. We know a lot about the prolific comic book artists, but much less about the writers. Wessler, whose name is unknown except for his EC connection and the more recent DC scripts that he received credit for, is probably one of the more prolific comics creators, having written (and drawn) for comics full time for the past forty years. If you've read many non-super hero comics at all during that period, it's highly probable that you've read Wessler stories without even knowing it.

Wessler was born in New York in 1913. In retrospect it seems that he was a natural for comics, since he was interested in both writing and drawing from a very young age. In evening courses at Columbia University and City College he studied writing—also Spanish, and particularly French, a lifelong interest of his. In fact, he acted in several French plays at Columbia.

While studying in the evening, Wessler worked during the day for the Fleischer Animation Studio. He started there around 1932 and was with the Studio for 11 years, moving to Florida when it went South and following it again when it returned to New York, being one of the last to return before the Miami studio finally shut down.

Through a Fleischer connection, Wessler started freelancing "animated" comic book scripts by mail for Dick Hughes at Cinema Comics in his free time while still in Miami. After returning to New York Wessler continued to freelance while with Fleischer, but before long he moved full time to Cinema Comics at 45 W. 45th Street, a few doors down from the Fleischer Studios. There he had a staff job writing and drawing "animated" comic features, which, according to Wessler, paid more money than most animators were getting. While at this job, Wessler continued to do freelance work. Eventually he turned to freelancing full time, which he's done ever since, with brief exceptions such as a few months with a greeting card company when comics were in a slump.

Over the many years Wessler has worked for virtually every comics company that ever existed. In spite of Wessler's plea, "Please don't add up all the years I worked for different companies . . . that'd make me about 150 years old," it seems easiest to describe his career by listing the major companies he's worked for.

Nedor/Pines. According to the Bails/Ware *Who's Who*, Wessler wrote and drew such features as "The Fair Twins and Mr. Frost," "Harry Hare," and "Filbert Fox" for Pines from 1944-45.

ACG. Again per Bails/Ware, Wessler did "Merry Go Round" (and undoubtedly other features) from 1943-52. Quite certainly, this is the company that Wessler refers to as Cinema Comics.

Rural Home. Bails/Ware credit Wessler with "Laffy Daffy" in 1945.

Will Eisner. Wessler recalls doing "a few jobs" for Eisner, possibly on commercial comics.

Timely/Atlas/Marvel. Wessler got his first work at Timely through a former Fleischer employee, Pauline Loth, in 1944 or 1945, when Stan Lee was still in the Army. Between then and 1957 Wessler claims to have scripted over 700 stories for Timely, mostly four and five pagers of the mystery, crime and horror variety, but also for romance and other genres. Because of their brevity and the speed with which he wrote them (sometimes from a title suggestion by Stan Lee), he says, "It's almost unfair to call them stories." Since Timely published several hundred titles over this period, Wessler's output, prodigious as it is, must still have been a small percentage of their total stories.

Orbit/Toytown. One of Wessler's early accounts (starting in 1945) was writing, drawing and creating characters for "animated" type stories for Rae Herman. One of the features he recalls creating was "Upan Atom," an atomic powered baby. "I delivered finished jobs—no editor's approval," he says. He also drew covers for their "animated" titles. Later, when crime comics were big, Herman asked Wessler to submit some crime synopses. "She didn't care for what I cooked up; she rejected my synops and I was out in the cold—but not for long." Segue to . . .

Lev Gleason. "I offered my services to Biro-Wood and was soon grinding out scripts for *Crime Does Not Pay* and *Crime and Punishment.* My favorite editor at Gleason was Bill Kofoed, who had published pulps and been a sports writer. Bill said that as far as he was concerned I was his only crime writer." One of Wessler's favorite assignments at Gleason was writing *Black Diamond* scripts. "When romance stories began to find a market, Lev Gleason hired Henry Leiferant, who had turned out the first romance magazines for MacFadden Publications." Wessler did two romance stories at Gleason—his first in that genre. Wessler also worked on *Tops,* Biro's ill fated attempt to produce an "adult" comic magazine. He was with Gleason from 1949-52, and then apparently returned near the end of 1954—one reason his volume of scripts for EC began to fall off at that time.

Hillman. Simultaneous to his work at Gleason, Wessler was writing westerns and crime stories for Ed Cronin, Hillman's editor, who had been a cohort of Wessler's at the Fleischer Studios.

Standard. This was another big account for Wessler. In addition to many scripts for "animated" funny animals and some for romance comics, he created and illustrated covers for such titles as *Supermouse* and *Goofy.* Wessler describes these as "the easiest money I ever made." The rate was $50 per cover and once, while vacationing in Florida, he did three in one day and took it easy the rest of the week.

Prize/Crestwood. Wessler wrote about 60 stories for Simon and Kirby or directly for Simon, in romance and other genres.

Fox. "Only if I was desperate for work did I write for Fox Features. I tore all record of my work for Victor Fox out of my payment book. The hardest part of the work was collecting. Somewhere I have some shares of stock in a Pittsburgh printing plant that he sent in payment for some work or other. I never tried to cash in on the stock. If typical of Fox, the company was nonexistent."

Quality. For editor Al Grenet, Wessler wrote "animated" (*Buster Bear*), teenage (*Jonesy*) and romance stories from 1953-55.

Ziff-Davis. Wessler wrote about 30 romance and other stories for editors Jerry Siegel and Irv Werstein. (Later, Werstein also wrote scripts for EC.)

Harvey. When the comic industry collapsed in the fifties, Wessler's mainstay became the little kid books of the Harvey brothers—*Hot Stuff, Wendy, Spooky, Little Dot, Little Lotta,* and especially *Richie Rich* and "my all time favorite" *Baby Huey.* Wessler takes responsibility for all but the first few *Baby Huey* scripts. He didn't do any drawing for Harvey, but his scripts were done in fairly finished layout form on special storyboard-type paper that Harvey supplied for the purpose. Wessler claims "credit for having started a common expression. Baby Huey kept saying 'Duh . . . this is a fun game!' 'This is a fun car!' etc. That expression came into its own just a few years back—I suppose when the kids who read *Baby Huey* grew up." In 1957 Wessler moved back to Florida and has continued to freelance by mail ever since.

Charlton. In the sixties and seventies Wessler wrote fantasy-type scripts for Charlton.

National/DC. In 1968 Wessler returned from his diet of Harvey kiddie books to less juvenile fare, and since that time he's produced as many stories for DC as he did for Timely in an earlier decade (over 700 DC stories by his count). The only continuing character he worked on was *Tomahawk,* a feature that he enjoyed writing very much, "not that I'm a western buff, but the characters were great to work with." The Indian chief in that feature with the hand made of iron was his creation. For the most part, however, he stuck to genre short stories for editors Murray Boltinoff and Jack Harris—*The Witching Hour, Unexpected,* etc., but also romance, and a few war and science fiction stories.

Wessler has also written for the black-and-white comics magazines published by *Marvel, Skywald* and *Warren.*

I suspect that there are other writers who have labored as prolifically in the comics as Carl Wessler has (the names of Gardner Fox, Otto Binder and Stan Lee come to mind), but that they are few in number. When it comes to length of service, however, Wessler's record may be unique—who else can claim to have written for the comics solidly for forty years?

THE WESSLER STORIES

LISTING IN ORDER OF COMPLETION

Wessler's voluminous files contained the raw data that enabled this listing to be compiled, but discovering this fact was only one step in an incredibly complex process. First, he had to find this data, and he and his wife searched through his files several times to come up with the necessary material. The most important find was his payment record book, which listed the date each story was completed, his working title, the number of pages in the story, and the type of story or the comic book title he thought it would appear in. Though there seem to be a few errors (and possibly some omissions), this list fixed the number of stories he wrote and provided important clues about each. The payment book alone, however, would have been useless, since EC changed virtually every one of Wessler's working titles.

So the Wesslers went back to the garage and unearthed the original crumbling carbons of the one-page plot synopses that he had submitted for approval before writing a story. In some cases they couldn't find the synopsis, but found and sent on a copy of the first page of the script. In many cases, these documents provided the necessary clear link between the payment record and the comic. Not always, though—sometimes Wessler used one title on the synopsis and another in the payment record book.

Finally, Wessler has been generous with his time in reviewing actual comic stories to test his memory and in answering many questions through the mail and by telephone over the past two years.

By sifting through the wealth of raw data it has been possible to come up with a fairly definitive list, though sometimes it was not unlike solving those frustrating narrative logic problems in the back of crossword puzzle books. Listed below are the entries in Wessler's payment record book, followed by the EC title for the story in capital letters, and comments where relevant. Additional information obtained from Wessler's files may be found in the notes and comments in Russ Cochran's EC Library volumes.

Oct. 13, 1953. "??." 7 pp. (Crime). Wessler could not find any scripts or synopses for his first six stories, so the trick in these cases is to find a story of the same length in the right time frame (a cover date six to eight months after he submitted it) that fits his title and subject, and which he recalls as his. This first entry, without a title, could be almost anything.

Oct. 13, 1953. "Date With Death." 7 pp. (Crime Suspense). This is probably "AS YE SOW . . ." (*SSS* # 14, Apr.-May 1954), which fits Wessler's title well and which he recalls as his. Remember that only a few stories will fall into the three categories of date, page length and genre. Wessler comments: "Very familiar . . . I recall having used that gimmick where the wronged husband, trying to catch his wife and the other man, rings a wrong doorbell deliberately to gain entrance."

Oct. 14, 1953. "The Gift." 6 pp. (Crime Suspense). The combined factors of Wessler recalling "RETURN BLOW" (*CSS* # 23, Jun.-Jul. 1954) as his, and no other six page story in the time frame fitting his title make this nearly a certainty.

Oct. 22, 1953. "The Secret." 6 pp. (Weird). This is undoubtedly "THE SECRET" (*HoF* # 24, Mar.-Apr. 1954), although no corroborating synopsis exists.

Oct. 29, 1953. "The Ripper." 7 pp. (Weird). "HEAD ROOM," (*HoF* # 24, Mar.-Apr. 1954). Proof is provided here by Wessler's recollection of his annoyance that "fetid" was misspelled "feted" in the story's opening caption.

Nov. 5, 1953. "The Vampire." 7 pp. (Weird). Wessler's synopsis titled "The Suspect" tells of a man who ties someone up and waits to see if he turns into a vampire at midnight. When nothing happens, he throws the stake into the fireplace, but finds too late that the suspect had turned the clock back. From this beginning obviously came "BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT" (*TftC* # 42, Jun.-Jul. 1954), a story Wessler recalls as his. Factors of dating, subject and story length tie "The Suspect" to this payment record book entry.

Nov. 6, 1953. "Till Death Do Us Part." 7 pp. (Suspense). "LAST RESORT," (*CSS* # 23, Jun.-Jul. 1954).

Nov. 18, 1953. "The Big Heat." 7 pp. (Shock Suspense). "WELL TRAINED," (*SSS* # 15, Jun.-Jul. 1954).

Nov. 20, 1953. "The Figurehead." 7 pp. (Shock). "HOODWINKED," (*TftC* # 42, Jun.-Jul. 1954).

Dec. 4, 1953. "Werewolf Concerto." 8 pp. (Vault of Horror). "CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND WEREWOLF," (*TftC* # 42, Jun.-Jul. 1954).

Dec. 5, 1953. "Easy Dies It." 6 pp. (Witch's Cauldron). "OUT COLD," (*HoF* # 25, May-Jun. 1954).

Dec. 8, 1953. "The Doomed." 7 pp. (Vault of Horror). "CHOP TALK," (*VoH* # 37, Jun.-Jul. 1954). Wessler's synopsis contained the snap ending, but not the plot complications with the typical Feldstein/Gaines element of an extra-marital affair, which one assumes was suggested in a story conference.

Dec. 9, 1953. "Ice." 7 pp. (Crime Suspense). "CRUSHED ICE," (*CSS* # 24, Aug.-Sep. 1954). Only the synopsis, titled "The Frozen Stiff," has turned up; but the usual factors of dating, etc., make this a certainty. In the synopsis, two men "in a dive in Canada" fight over a diamond ring found in the street, and one is killed. From there, the disposition of the body, the recurring dream, etc., is similar to the final story. Once again, a wife, marital discord and an illicit triangle have been added, and again, it's not difficult to guess from whom these ideas for changes came.

Dec. 10, 1953. "The Mine." 6 pp. (Suspense). "FOOD FOR THOUGHT," (*CSS* # 24, Aug.-Sep. 1954). In Wessler's synopsis the gas in the mine is real and causes the explosion that seals Kip off.

Dec. 22, 1953. "The Brute." 8 pp. (Cr. Suspense). "A KIND OF JUSTICE," (*SSS* # 16, Aug.-Sep. 1954). Wessler comments: "I recall vividly how the 'rape' story came about. Bill and Al asked me to read a story in a digest-sized mag. I don't remember what it was about except that it involved a young girl. Then they left the room, and by the time they came back I had the whole story in mind. They approved. Most of the time they came up with suggestions and/or criticism that helped make the stories." This doesn't entirely reconcile with Wessler's note at the bottom of his synopsis: "Story doesn't have to involve rape, if that's objectionable." Why this note, if the story was thought up and approved at one session? The synopsis is, however, identical to the story, with the minor but significant modification of the ending: "She pleads with him not to do it again, but he grabs her, kisses her passionately."

Carl Wessler in 1952.

Dec. 26, 1953. "The Execution." 6 pp. (Cr. Suspense). ". . . MY BROTHER'S KEEPER," (*SSS* # 16, Aug.-Sep. 1954). Note: a similar story, "Tale of Cain," appeared in *Tomb of Terror* # 12, Nov. 1953.

Dec. 30, 1953. "Because He Looked Like Me." 8 pp. (Susp.). "DOUBLE CROSSED," (*CSS* # 24, Aug.-Sep. 1954). Synopsis title: "The Man Who Looked Like Me." With this story, EC raised Wessler's rate by a dollar a page.

Dec. 31, 1953. "Thou Shalt Not Covet." 7 pp. (VH). "COLD WAR," (*TftC* # 43, Aug.-Sep. 1954).

Jan. 5, 1954. "The Body Snatchers." 7 pp. (C. K.). "COFFIN SPELL," (*VoH* # 38, Aug.-Sep. 1954).

Jan. 14, 1954. "The Moron." 7 pp. (OW). "OUT OF SIGHT," (*VoH* # 38, Aug.-Sep. 1954).

Jan. 18, 1954. "The Catacombs." 6 pp. (CK). One of the few New Trend stories where Wessler's title was untampered with, this is "THE CATACOMBS," (*VoH* # 38, Aug.-Sep. 1954).

Jan. 22, 1954. "The Stalker." 6 pp. (Suspense). "THE ASSASSIN," (*SSS* # 17, Oct.-Nov. 1954).

Jan. 26, 1954. "The Sea Hag." 8 pp. (Vault of Horror). "ANY SPORT IN A STORM," (*VoH* # 38, Aug.-Sep. 1954).

Feb. 1, 1954. "Power." 7 pp. (Suspense). "THE PEN IS MIGHTIER," (*SSS* # 16, Aug.-Sep. 1954). It's obvious that Wessler was especially interested in this synopsis, which was written with more conscious style than most: "Now Zack has a newspaper column. With his typewriter he routs out evil. He destroys the wicked. This man is god! Now he has a radio program. Drive, drive, drive! Drive out the crooks, the tinhorns." Wessler's more convoluted synopses sometimes became simplified when they took script form, but this one survived intact, with a novelistic structure unusual for EC.

Feb. 5, 1954. "Rot." 8 pp. (CK). "FOREVER AMBERGRIS," (*TftC* # 44, Oct.-Nov. 1954).

Feb. 8, 1954. "Doubloons or Nothing." 7 pp. (VK). "BURIAL AT SEA," (*TftC* # 44, Oct.-Nov. 1954). Synopsis titles: ". . . And Six Feet Deep" and "The Deep Six." This story underwent major revisions, including a new ending and a reduction from six characters to two.

Feb. 11, 1954. "The Lady is a Vamp." 6 pp. (CK). That "THE PROPOSAL" (*TftC* # 44, Oct.-Nov. 1954) is Wessler's story is proven by his synopsis titled "The Ghoul Next Door." The script, presumably with the "Vamp" title, is missing.

Feb. 15, 1954. "The Sliceman Cometh." 7 pp. (OW). No script or synopsis has been found, but the title and Wessler's recollection prove this to be "THE SLICEMAN COMETH" (*TftC* # 44, Oct.-Nov. 1954).

Feb. 16, 1954. "Strictly From Hunger." 6 pp. (VK). "THE PURGE," (*VoH* # 39, Oct.-Nov. 1954). Another cluttered synopsis simplified; Wessler's first idea was to have several maladies, several wizards.

Feb. 22, 1954. "Annie's Lover." 8 pp. (CS). "4-SIDED TRIANGLE," (*SSS* # 17, Oct.-Nov. 1954). Wessler's two early story ideas (one with a rape-murder and an avenging straw scarecrow come to life) underwent extensive revisions. From his most crude repellant synopsis ("Passionately he grabs the girl and you-know-what. Afterward the girl sits on the ground crying, saying that she's gonna tell the farmer's wife what he did. Farmer isn't going to let that happen, so he grabs up pitchfork, drives the tines deep into her chest."), Wessler developed a script that was possibly his best written, and certainly his most poetic. It remains one of his favorites.

Feb. 27, 1954. "Curtain Call." 7 pp. (CK). That "TOP BILLING" (*VoH* # 39, Oct.-Nov. 1954) is Wessler's story is proven by his script titled "The Slay's the Thing." Presumably "Curtain Call" is an alternate title for the same story.

Mar. 2, 1954. "Blue Plate Special." 6 pp. (Tales of the Crypt). "SUCCESS STORY," (*TftC* # 46, Feb.-Mar. 1955). An alternate title on the synopsis is "The Failure." This story is somewhat similar to EC's earlier "Just Desserts" (*SSS* # 3, Jun.-Jul. 1952), which in turn bears a strong similarity to Ray Bradbury's "The Smiling People" (*Dark Carnival*). Note that the stories in *TftC* # 46

appeared much later than other stories written at the same time. EC did not normally maintain any story backlog. This issue was originally intended to be *Crypt of Terror* # 1, but was held back due to increasing attacks on horror comics, and was slipped in as the last issue of *Tales from the Crypt.*

Mar. 5, 1954. "A Hag, A Moan, and a Panic Scare." 7 pp. (TC). Easy to see why EC changed this title to "TATTER UP" (*TftC* # 46, Feb.-Mar. 1955).

Mar. 5, 1954. "Wait for Me, Darling." 7 pp. (CS). That "COMEBACK" (*CSS* # 26, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955) is Wessler's story is proven by his script titled "Man Wanted." The payment record book listing is obviously an alternate title for the same story, which has as its central theme a man's request of his girlfriend, "Remember that I love you and wait for me."

Mar. 6, 1954. "The Keepers of Harrow Island." 7 pp. (VH). At this point a puzzling anomaly occurs in Wessler's payment record book; there are two stories that are each listed twice. In both cases the second listing shows the story as having one less page than the first listing, and in both cases the second listing reflects the number of pages actually in the comic. Further, in both cases the story appears in the first issue of a title to be cut back by two story pages to make room for two extra pages of ads, and both are one of the stories thus cut back. For example, one would expect that the story for this listing, "AN HARROW ESCAPE" (*VoH* # 40, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955), would be seven pages long in accordance with EC's strict 8-7-6-7 story sequence, being the second story in the book. However the printed story is only six. The case is similar for the other duplicate listing (see "The Castaways"/"TELESCOPE" below). If you've followed all this so far, you can see that a pattern clearly emerges, even if it isn't clear just *how* the duplication came about. The most logical explanation is that Wessler wrote and was paid for (in the case of "Harrow") a seven page story. Then EC made a sudden decision to run the two extra pages of ads, and cut the script back a page before giving it to the artist. Then, because of the confusion of story length, either EC or Wessler somehow ascribed *another* payment for *another* story to the same title. Since the amounts shown as paid are different in the first and second listing (conforming to the listed page length), it seems impossible that these duplications are simply the result of Wessler's carelessness in listing the same payment twice. And, as Wessler says, "I certainly was not paid twice for the same story." As seen below, other evidence also supports the conclusion that the second listings represent additional stories.

Mar. 8, 1954. "The Frail Male." 7 pp. (VH). "ALL FOR GNAWT," (*VoH* # 39, Oct.-Nov. 1954).

Mar. 9, 1954. "How to Recognize a Werewolf." 8 pp. (TC). "UPON REFLECTION," (*TftC* # 46, Feb.-Mar. 1955).

Mar. 10, 1954. "The Punishment of a Puritan Playboy." 7 pp. (HF). "GAME WASHED OUT," (*HoF* # 27, Sep.-Oct. 1954). Synopsis title: "The Punishment."

Mar. 18, 1954. "From Fear to Eternity." 8 pp. (VH). "DEADLY BELOVED," (*VoH* # 39, Oct.-Nov. 1954).

Mar. 23, 1954. "The Castaways." 8 pp. This is the other story that appears twice in Wessler's listings. The printed version, "TELESCOPE" (*TftC* # 45, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955), is only seven pages long, despite the fact that lead stories were always eight, and that the listing here indicates that Wessler received payment for eight pages. Again, the logical assumption is that the script was cut down a page after Wessler submitted it.

Mar. 26, 1954. "Beautiful Screamer." 6 pp. (TC). "MURDER DREAM," (*TftC* # 45, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955).

Mar. 27, 1954. "The Keepers of Harrow Island." 6 pp. (VH). Duplicate listing. For details, see listing for Mar. 6, 1954, above. Quite possibly this entry records the payment for "THE SUBSTITUTE" (*TftC* # 45, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955), a six page story that would have been written exactly at this time. Wessler says, "I'm 99.9% sure of 'The Substitute'—I always manage to squeeze in a bit of French." There is no documentation to substantiate his recollection, however.

Mar. 30, 1954. "Maniac at Large." 8 pp. (Shock). Note here just how confusing EC's changing of titles can be. This is not "Maniac at Large" (*CSS* # 27), which was not written by Wessler, but "THE FIXER" (*CSS* # 26, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955). The final version differs from the synopsis in that in the latter the boy kills his parents as well as the neighbors.

Mar. 31, 1954. "It's in the Bag." 8 pp. (VH). Yes, this is "IN THE BAG" (*SSS* # 18, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955). The eight page script was originally intended as a lead story for *The Vault of Horror,* and is complete with the Vault Keeper's comments. Probably due to the cancellation of that title, it was switched and cut down to six pages.

Apr. 2, 1954. "The Little Girl Gruesome." 8 pp. (TC). "ABOUT FACE," (*HoF* # 27, Sep.-Oct. 1954). Synopsis title: "The Nice Girl and the Horrid One."

Apr. 4, 1954. "The Castaways." 7 pp. (CK). Duplicate listing. For details, see listing for Mar. 6, 1954 and Mar. 23, 1954. Quite possibly this entry records the payment for the seven page story listed below.

(Not listed.) Wessler has a synopsis titled "Love Me in December," which does not tie in to any entry in the payment record book. This story is "THE SWITCH" (*TftC* # 45, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955). Says Wessler: "I'm sure of 'The Switch.' So is the clown who named the lead character Carlton Webster."

Apr. 5, 1954. "Turnabout." 6 pp. (VH). "THE PIT," (*VoH* # 40, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955). Synopsis title: "The Battlers." Yet another story where marital discord is present in the final version, but

not in the synopsis, which simply tells of two brothers who get rich on animal fights, and of the animals' revenge on the brothers.

Apr. 6, 1954. "Life Cycle." 6 pp. (VH). "ASHES TO ASHES," (*VoH* # 40, Dec. 1954-Jan 1955).

Apr. 1954. "Joe Cashes his Chips." 6 pp. (Shock). "RUNDOWN," (*SSS* # 18, Dec. 1954-Jan 1955).

Apr. 1954. "A Cad'lac for Pa." 6 pp. (Shock). "CADILLAC FEVER," (*SSS* # 18, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955). Synopses titles: "Cadillac," "Stepping Stones." This story went through several major changes in the synopsis stage.

Apr. 1954. "Blue Nose." 7 pp. (TC). "THE PRUDE," (*HoF* # 28, Nov.-Dec. 1954). Synopsis title. "Blue Law."

Apr. 1954. "Music to Scream By." 5 pp. (TC). "AUDITION," (*HoF* # 28, Nov.-Dec. 1954).

Apr. 1954. "Big Game." 6 pp. (TC). "NUMB-SKULL," (*HoF* # 28, Nov.-Dec. 1954).

May 6, 1954. "The Satisfied Customer." 8 pp. (CT). That "A WORK OF ART" (*HoF* # 28, Nov.-Dec. 1954) is Wessler's story is proven by his synopsis titled "A Most Important Undertaking." That this is one and the same as "Customer" is more or less proven by the fact that there are no other unidentified eight page stories in this time frame.

May 13, 1954. "Short Changed." 6 pp. (TC). Written and sold, but never used due to the abrupt end of the horror titles. Apparently intended as the third story in an issue of *The Haunt of Fear.* Synopsis title: "The Doll House." *Squa Tront* is proud to print Wessler's original script for this story for the first time, elsewhere in this issue.

May 14, 1954. "Herb's Brother." 6 pp. (VH). Apparently written and sold, but never used. Similar in concept to EC's earlier, "Mr. Biddy . . . Killer" (*CSS* # 5), the synopsis tells of a man who blames his brother for a murder, but it's revealed at the end that he's an only child. "Most likely that other horror Dr. Wertham stopped this from being published," says Wessler.

May 18, 1954. "Goodbye Again." 8 pp. (CS). That "THE TRAP" (*SSS* # 18, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955) is Wessler's story is proven by his synopsis titled "Big Joke." A note on the synopsis identifies the story as "Goodbye."

May 20, 1954. "A Good Boy." 6 pp. (CS). "GOOD BOY," (*CSS* # 27, Feb.-Mar. 1955).

May 24, 1954. "Dream of Murder." 6 pp. (CS). This is not "Murder Dream" (*TftC* # 45), although Wessler wrote that story, but "WHERE THERE'S SMOKE . . ." (*CSS* # 27, Feb.-Mar. 1955).

May 27, 1954. "Two Half-Crowns." 6 pp. (Piracy). "A FITTING END," (*Piracy* # 2, Dec. 1954-Jan. 1955).

June 1, 1954. "Submarine." 6 pp. (Piracy). Wessler's recollection, combined with the fact that *Piracy* had only one submarine story, proves this as "NAZI U-BOAT" (*Piracy* # 3, Feb.-Mar. 1955). With this story, EC lowered their rates by a dollar per page.

June 4, 1954. "Escape." 6 pp. (Sc. Fiction). No script or synopsis has been found. Wessler recalls this as being "VICIOUS CIRCLE" (*WSF* # 29, May-Jun. 1955). His title doesn't fit that story particularly well, but the original synopsis may have subsequently been modified. He says, "I never cared much for science-fiction, although I've done some recently for DC. It was accidental that I did one for EC; I probably didn't know what I was doing."

June 7, 1954. "The Diamond Pendant." 7 pp. (Misery). This adaptation of de Maupassant's "THE DIAMOND PENDANT" (*Impact* # 1, Mar.-Apr. 1955) was, according to Wessler, "assigned to me by Bill Gaines, who asked me if I'd read the story; I'd read it in French." According to Wessler, Gaines's pet title for *Impact* was "Unexpected Misery," or "Misery," for short.

June 10, 1954. "The Arena." 7 pp. (Historical romance). "THE ARENA," (*Valor* # 1, Mar.-Apr. 1955).

June 11, 1954. "A Real Tough Cop." 5 pp. (Misery). "TOUGH COP," (*Impact* # 1, Mar.-Apr. 1955).

June 17, 1954. "The Cargo." 7 pp. (Piracy). "SLAVE SHIP," (*Piracy* # 3, Feb.-Mar. 1955). Wessler's handwritten comment at the bottom of his synopsis, "What d'ya mean it's Communist propaganda! So let's use a wild animal cargo," must have been written to ward off an imagined possible rejection when the synopsis was read. One can hardly believe that the authors of the famous *Shock* preachies would actually voice an objection to this anti-slavery tract, which, in fact, appeared in the comic unchanged from the synopsis.

June 15, 1954. "Revolution." 6 pp. (Historical Rom.). "REVOLUTION," (*Valor* # 1, Mar.-Apr. 1955).

June 18, 1954. "The Colonel's Son." 6 pp. (Historical Rom.). "THE COLONEL'S SON," (*Valor* # 2, May-Jun. 1955). Synopsis title: "Only Son."

June 21, 1954. "The Ensign and the Book." 6 pp. (Piracy). "BY THE BOOK," (*Piracy* # 4, Apr.-May 1955). Synopsis title: "The Midshipman and the Book." Wessler named his hero Blaine in the synopsis, which was changed to Price in the comic. A month later Wessler used the name Blaine again (see listing for July 30, 1954).

June 25, 1954. "I'm So Lonely." 6 pp. (Misery). "DIVORCE," (*Impact* # 2, May-Jun. 1955). Wessler was doing his best to live up to the "misery" concept.

June 25, 1954. "These Gallant Days." 7 pp. (Airplane). "THE NEW C. O.," (*Aces High* # 1, Mar.-Apr. 1955). In this, as in the majority of Wessler's New Direction stories, the final story is nearly identical to the synopsis.

July 12, 1954. "Mechanic." 7 pp. (Airplane). "HOME AGAIN," (*Aces High* # 4, Sep.-Oct. 1955). Synopsis title: "Yank Abroad." After telling of the incident where the mechanic "borrows" a plane and suddenly finds himself behind an Albatros

squadron, Wessler, in his synopsis states, "This actually happened to Quentin Roosevelt, who shot down one of them before fleeing." For reasons unknown, this story seems to have been held about six months before being used. Several of Wessler's other New Direction stories were printed out of the order that they were written. Note also that the lead-time between the date the story was written and the cover date of the issue in which it appeared stretched in general from about seven months to nine or ten.

July 13, 1954. "Locker Nine." 6 pp. (Airplane). "LOCKER 9," (*Aces High* # 2, May-Jun. 1955).

July 14, 1954. "Round Table." 7 pp. (Hist. Romance). "THE KING'S SERVICE," (*Valor* # 2, May-Jun. 1955). Synopsis title: "The Stranger."

July 30, 1954. "I Hate Nick Blaine." 7 pp. (Air Combat). "THE CASE OF CHAMPAGNE," (*Aces High* # 3, Jul.-Aug. 1955). Wessler states on the synopsis, "Based on an actual W. War I experience." Blaine's requests to buy the champagne and his reasons (both real and imagined) for going up with Scotty are not mentioned in the original synopsis.

August 4, 1954. "The Good Father." 6 pp (Misery). "THE DEBT," (*Impact* # 3, Jul-Aug. 1955).

August 12, 1954. "2-pg. filler." (Piracy). Wessler's payment was for a one page filler; perhaps the reference to two pages refers to the manuscript length. One suspects EC suggested that Wessler resubmit a rejected synopsis as a filler.

August 16, 1954. "The Suit." 6 pp. (Misery) "THE SUIT," (*Impact* # 2, May-Jun. 1955). This is a plot in the classic O'Henry mold; rather impressive (if it wasn't borrowed).

August 21, 1954. "The Buzzard." 7 pp. (Air Combat). "CHIVALRY," (*Aces High* # 2, May-Jun. 1955).

August 21, 1954. "The Poet and the Emperor." 5 pp. (Hist. Rom.). How else would Feldstein and Gaines retitle this but "POETIC JUSTICE" (*Valor* # 2, May-Jun. 1955)? The story is six pages in the comic. Wessler did write a five page script, but it was subsequently expanded a page, probably by Feldstein.

September 5, 1954. "Teddy Bear." 6 pp. (Piracy). This is of course "RAG DOLL" (*Piracy* # 5, Jun.-Jul. 1955). Perhaps the title item was changed by EC because they realized that teddy bears were named after Teddy Roosevelt and would therefore be an anachronism in 1810. Synopsis title: "The Timid Tar."

September 25, 1954. "The Captain." 6 pp. (Piracy). "THE SKIPPER," (*Piracy* # 6, Aug.-Sep. 1955).

September 26, 1954. "The Garter." 6 pp. (Air). "THE GOOD LUCK PIECE," (*Aces High* # 4, Sep.-Oct. 1955). Synopsis title: "Superstition."

September 30, 1954. "The Novice." 6 pp. (Air) "THE NOVICE AND THE ACE," (*Aces High* # 4, Sep.-Oct. 1955). Synopsis title: "The Cocksure Novice."

October 2, 1954. "Fall Guy." 6 pp. (Misery). "FALL IN WINTER," (*Impact*, # 4, Sep.-Oct. 1955).

October 15, 1954. "Country Doctor." 7 pp. (Misery). "COUNTRY DOCTOR," (*Impact* # 4, Sep.-Oct. 1955).

October 18, 1954. "The Challenge." 7 pp. (Historical Romance). "DANGEROUS ANIMAL," (*Valor* # 5, Nov.-Dec. 1955). The Comics Code required a slight change to Wessler's original ending, which, in his synopsis, read, "The new emperor says his empire wouldn't be complete without her beside him. One of the senators who knows her well remarks to another, 'And he thinks *man* is the most dangerous of all animals!'" Note: the synopsis, which is very similar to the final story, is labeled "Rewrite."

October 23, 1954. "Brain Tumor." 7 pp (Medic). "EVEN FOR A LITTLE WHILE," (*MD* # 2, Jun.-Jul. 1955). No script or synopsis survives, but the subject matter and Wessler's recollection prove this as his. He says, "When I was assigned to write 'Brain Tumor,' Al got info from his doctor-brother that patients undergoing that operation are immobilized with bags of sand." Since there's no mention of sandbags in the story, perhaps Wessler is misrecollecting. Careful review of the printed story reveals that the Comics Code removed the captions in all the panels showing the operation; the sandbags may have been mentioned in these captions.

October 28, 1954. "Doctor's Daughter." 6 pp. (Medic). "THE LESSON," (*MD* # 3, Aug.-Sep. 1955). This story underwent major changes from the original synopsis, titled "Emergency," which told of a young speeder who is stopped by a policeman. An accident call comes over the police radio, and the policeman takes him to the accident and the subsequent emergency operation. The patient, a male not related to the doctor, dies After a scene with the angry parent and the reformed boy that is similar to the final version, the cop remarks, "The patient died, but the operation was still a success!" These changes show that EC and its writers were still carefully working out the best stories they could, right up to the end of the series. This story also suffered a Code deletion of a caption in the operation sequence.

November 2, 1954. "Cerebral Palsy." 6 pp. (Medic). "DIFFERENT," (*MD* # 2, Jun.-Jul. 1955).

November 5, 1954. "Polio." 7 pp. (Medic). "SO THAT OTHERS MAY WALK," (*MD* # 4, Oct.-Nov. 1955). Wessler describes an interesting little moment in his synopsis that's not in the final script. When Jimmy plays baseball, "he bats, supporting himself on one crutch, hits the ball and runs on all fours (I remember a boyhood friend of mine doing just that in our ball games)."

November 29, 1954. "The Man Who Captured a Fleet." 6 pp. "UP THE RIVER," (*Piracy* # 7, Oct.-Nov. 1955).

November 29, 1954. "Revolution." 6 pp. (Piracy). This seems to be merely a duplicate listing for the previous story, since no separate script or synopsis has been found and there is no other story in the later issues of *Piracy* that fits the title. Wessler agrees with this conclusion.

January 25, 1955. "The Boy Who Cried." 6 pp. (Impact # 5). "THE TRAVELERS," (*Impact* # 5, Nov.-Dec. 1955). In Wessler's synopsis, there are two kids, not one, in the family across the aisle, and they're real brats

January 26, 1955. "Spads Were Trump." 6 pp. (Aces High # 5). Yep, this is "SPADS WERE TRUMP" (*Aces High* # 5, Nov.-Dec. 1955).

February 22, 1955. "Eat, Drink, and Be Buried" (Ulcer) 7 pp. (Medic # 4). "WORRIED SICK," (*MD* # 4, Oct.-Nov. 1955).

Wessler identified "THE HAZING" (*SSS* # 16, Aug.-Sep. 1954) as his several times during our two year correspondence. "I'm sure I did do a story for EC about a fellow who wanted to get into a fraternity," he says. However, there is no independent supporting evidence that he wrote the story.

LISTING BY COMIC TITLE

THE VAULT OF HORROR
- 37 Chop Talk
- 38 Any Sport in a Storm
  Coffin Spell
  The Catacombs
  Out of Sight . . .
- 39 Deadly Beloved
  Top Billing
  The Purge
  All for Gnawt
- 40 An Harrow Escape
  The Pit
  Ashes to Ashes

TALES FROM THE CRYPT
- 42 Concerto for Violin and Werewolf
  By the Dawn's Early Light
  Hoodwinked
- 43 Cold War
- 44 Forever Ambergris
  Burial at Sea
  The Proposal
  The Sliceman Cometh
- 45 Telescope
  The Substitute [??]
  Murder Dream
  The Switch
- 46 Upon Reflection
  Success Story
  Tatter Up

THE HAUNT OF FEAR
- 24 The Secret
  Head Room
- 25 Out Cold
- 27 About Face
  Game Washed Out
- 28 The Prude
  Numbskull
  Audition
  A Work of Art

WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY
- 29 Vicious Circle [??]

CRIME SUSPENSTORIES
- 23 Return Blow
  Last Resort
- 24 Double-Crossed
  Crushed Ice
  Food for Thought
- 26 The Fixer
  Comeback
- 27 Where There's Smoke . . .
  Good Boy

SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES
- 14 As Ye Sow . . . [?]
- 15 Well Trained
- 16 . . . My Brother's Keeper
  The Hazing [??]
  A Kind of Justice
  The Pen is Mightier
- 17 4-Sided Triangle
  The Assassin
- 18 Cadillac Fever
  The Trap
  In the Bag
  Rundown

PIRACY
- 2 A Fitting End
- 3 Nazi U-Boat
  Slave Ship
- 4 By the Book
- 5 Rag Doll
- 6 The Skipper
- 7 Up the River

IMPACT
- 1 Tough Cop
  The Diamond Pendant (adaptation)
- 2 Divorce
  The Suit
- 3 The Debt
- 4 Fall in Winter
  Country Doctor
- 5 The Travelers

VALOR
- 1 The Arena
  Revolution
- 2 Poetic Justice
  The Colonel's Son
  The King's Service
- 5 Dangerous Animal

ACES HIGH
- 1 The New C. O.
- 2 Chivalry
  Locker 9
- 3 The Case of Champagne
- 4 The Good Luck Piece
  The Novice and the Ace
  Home Again
- 5 Spads Were Trump

MD
- 2 Different
  Even for a Little While
- 3 The Lesson
- 4 So That Others May Walk
  Worried Sick

—John Benson

SHORT CHANGED!

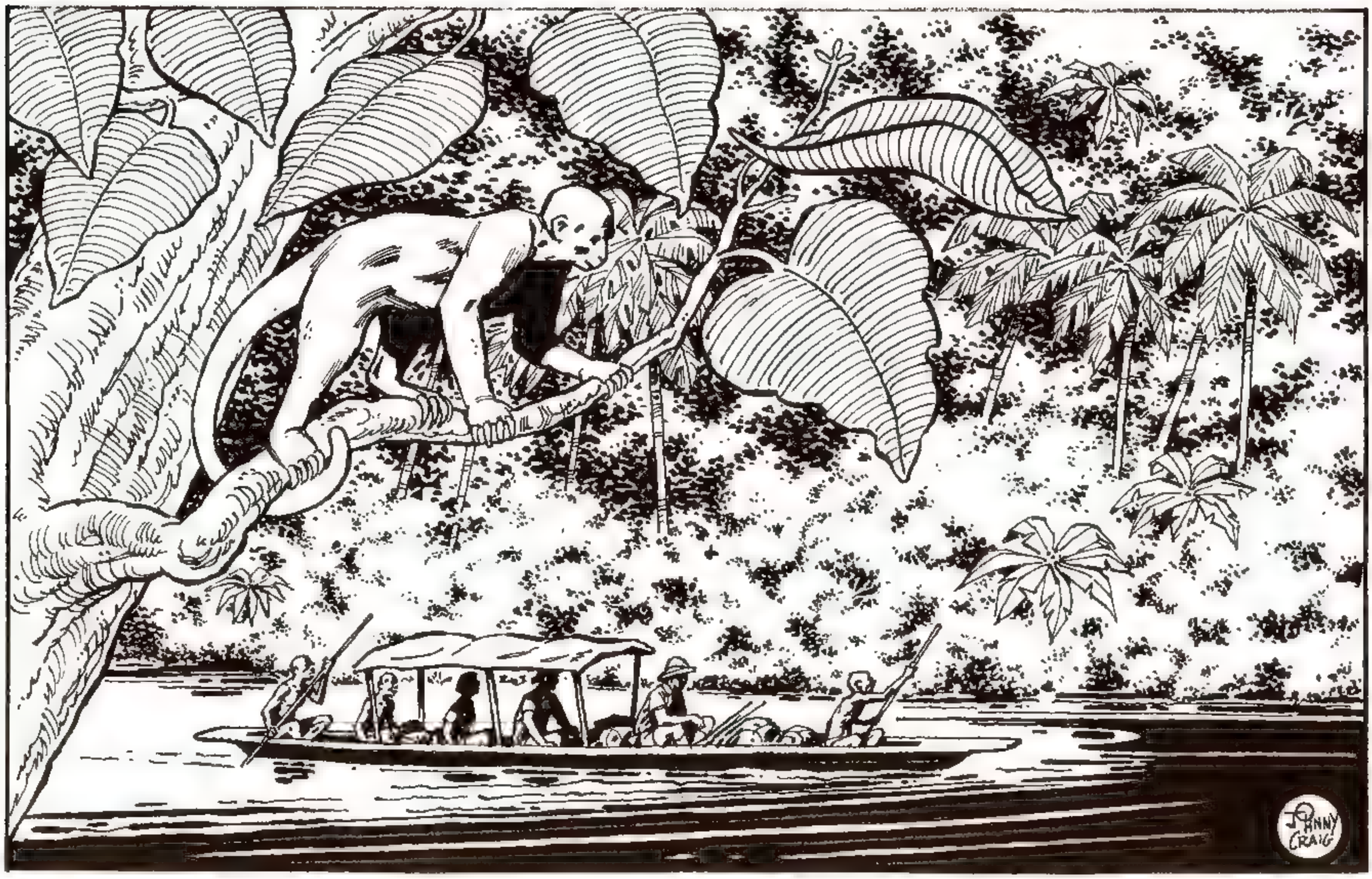


Illustration drawn especially for Squa Tront *by Johnny Craig*

HORROR 6 PAGES CARL WESSLER

ON INTRODUCTION: HERE'S THE TORMENTED TALE OF A TWOSOME WHO SHRANK FROM LOVE. I CALL IT...

SHORT CHANGED

SPLASH: Drawing room of the Nelson home; Peter Nelson, in his 30's, holds his pretty wife Harriet close with one arm, reaching past her with his free arm to clasp the hand of good-looking Ralph Abbot. Debby, pretty 8-year-old daughter of the Nelsons, runs joyfully towards her father from another room. Peter's luggage and a paper-wrapped package, containing a doll, are on the floor at his feet.

CAPTION: PETER NELSON WAS HOME, AND A MIST OF HAPPINESS WELLED UP IN HIS EYES. HOW GOOD TO BE HOME AGAIN, TO HOLD HARRIET CLOSE! HOW GOOD THAT HE COULD NOT SEE THE DISTORTED LOOK OF DISGUST ON HER PRETTY FACE! HOW GOOD TO HEAR DEBBY'S FOOTSTEPS, RUNNING, AND THE MELODIOUS CHIRPING OF HER BIRDLIKE VOICE! AND HOW GOOD OF RALPH ABBOT--FAITHFUL, DEPENDABLE, HANDSOME RALPH ABBOT--HOW GOOD OF HIM TO BE THERE..!

HARRIET: PETER...DARLING!

RALPH: WELCOME HOME, PETER. IT'LL BE GREAT TO HAVE YOU BACK IN HARNESS AT THE MUSEUM...

DEBBY: DADDY! DADDY!

1/ See caption.

CAPTION: PETER KNELT AS DEBBY FLUNG HERSELF INTO HIS ARMS, AND HE LOOKED INTO HER INNOCENT SMILING EYES, NOT LIKE HARRIET'S COLD, ANNOYED EYES. NOR LIKE RALPH'S CYNICALLY AMUSED EYES...

DEBBY: DID YOU BRING ME SOMETHING BACK, DADDY..?

PETER: YOU KNOW I DID, SWEETHEART! DON'T I ALWAYS..?

2/ See caption, dialogue.

CAPTION: PETER PICKED UP A PAPER-WRAPPED PACKAGE, AND DEBBY LED HIM EAGERLY BY THE HAND TO HER PLAYROOM...

RALPH: WHAT ABOUT THOSE CRATES FROM GREECE, PETER. HADN'T WE BETTER BE AT THE MUSEUM TO CATALOGUE THEM?

PETER: (Smiling) AS MY CAPABLE ASSISTANT, RALPH, I DELEGATE THAT JOB TO YOU. RIGHT NOW I HAVE A MORE IMPORTANT MATTER TO ATTEND TO!

PAGE TWO

1/ There's a large dollhouse on the playroom floor, surrounded by dolls in costumes of Italian, Egyptian, Oriental, etc, design. Peter sits on the floor with Debby, as she eagerly tears the wrapping from the package.

PETER: EASY THERE! THAT MAY BE A BOX OF CANDY, YOU KNOW!

DEBBY: BETCHA IT WON'T BE!

2/ She's thrilled with the Greek costumed doll she has unwrapped.

DEBBY: A REAL GREEK DOLL! OH, IT'S BEAUTIFUL, DADDY!

3/ She flings herself into his arms.

PETER: HOW ABOUT A NICE BIG HUG, HONEY?

DEBBY: I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE BACK, DADDY!

4/ Close-up, both.

PETER: WERE YOU LONELY WHILE I WAS AWAY, DEB?

DEBBY: I MISSED YOU VERY MUCH... 'COURSE, UNCLE RALPH WAS HERE A LOT OF TIMES TO SEE MOMMY, BUT THAT'S NOT LIKE HAVING MY OWN DADDY!

5/ See caption.

CAPTION: FROM THE MOUTH OF A BABE! A SHADOW CROSSED PETER'S BROW. A GLIMMER OF SUSPICION GLITTERED IN HIS EYES...

PETER: RALPH ABBOT...HERE...A LOT OF TIMES?

6/ Peter, about to go out, looks back at Harriet and Debby at the front door.

CAPTION: PETER RECALLED THAT HARRIET'S GREETING HAD LACKED WARMTH, THAT RALPH'S HANDSHAKE HAD BEEN LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC. AND THOUGH PETER'S SUSPICION GREW FIRMER, HE SMILED AT HIS WIFE BEFORE LEAVING THE HOUSE...

PETER: I'M GOING TO MY OFFICE, DEAR. I WON'T BE LONG...

HARRIET: I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU.

7/ Peter is in the museum. He hesitates outside of the glass-paneled door to his office.

LETTERING ON DOOR: DEPT. OF ARCHAEOLOGY PETER NELSON, CURATOR

CAPTION: PETER'S SUSPICIONS WERE NOT ALLAYED THEN, UPON REACHING HIS OFFICE AT THE MUSEUM, HE HEARD RALPH SPEAKING ON THE PHONE...

RALPH: (Balloon from office) [illegible] IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE, DARLING. I'LL MANAGE TO SEE YOU SOMEHOW!

PETER: (Thought) THAT'S HARRIET--CALLING TO WARN HIM I'M COMING..!

PAGE THREE

1/ See caption.

CAPTION: AND YET, WHEN PETER ENTERED THE OFFICE RALPH SEEMED GENUINELY SURPRISED AND GLAD TO SEE HIM...

RALPH: WELL, YOU JUST COULDN'T STAY AWAY, EH, PETER. I HOPE YOU'LL BE PLEASED WITH THE WAY I'VE LOOKED AFTER THINGS WHILE YOU WERE GONE!

PETER: LOOKED AFTER--OH, OF COURSE, RALPH. YOU ALWAYS DO A SPLENDID JOB. BUT I'M NOT HERE TO CHECK ON YOU...

2/ See caption.

CAPTION: [illegible] PETER STUDIED HIS ASSISTANT'S REACTIONS...

PETER: I WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU DIDN'T UNPACK MY EQUIPMENT. YOU SEE, I'VE DECIDED TO SET OUT AT ONCE ON ANOTHER EXPEDITION...TO Brazil [illegible] THIS TIME!

RALPH: Brazil! [illegible] LOOK HERE, PETER, I DON'T WANT TO INTERFERE WITH YOUR PRIVATE LIFE, BUT WHAT ABOUT HARRIET? YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FROM HER SO LONG! WHY NOT LET ME GO TO ECUADOR?

3/ See caption.

CAPTION: RALPH ABBOT WAS EITHER ENTIRELY INNOCENT OF ROMANTIC INVOLVEMENT WITH HARRIET NELSON OR AN EXTREMELY CLEVER ACTOR! PETER WANT TO FIND OUT WHICH...

PETER: OH, I WANT YOU TO COME ALONG WITH ME, RALPH. I KNOW HARRIET WILL BE LONELY, BUT THIS WILL BE MY LAST TRIP FOR SOME TIME.

RALPH: THIS IS WONDERFUL, PETER! GOING ON AN EXPEDITION WITH YOU WILL BE THE GREATEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE!

4/ Peter smiles wryly to himself as he gets into his car in front of the museum.

CAPTION: AS PETER GOT INTO HIS CAR, THE DOUBTS THAT HAD HAUNTED HIM VANISHED...

PETER: I SHOULD'VE REALIZED DEBBY WAS EXAGGERATING, AS KIDS DO. IF RALPH CAME TO THE HOUSE TWO OR THREE TIMES, IT WOULD'VE SEEMED OFTEN TO HER!

5/ Closeup, Peter, in car.

PETER: I HAD NO RIGHT TO ASSUME THAT RALPH WAS TALKING TO HARRIET ON THE PHONE, EITHER...I HAD NO RIGHT TO EAVESDROP.

6/ See caption.

CAPTION: ALL SEEMED RIGHT WITH PETER NELSON'S WORLD... UNTIL HE ARRIVED HOME, WHERE HIS WIFE CONFRONTED HIM BITTERLY.

HARRIET: --YOU'RE NOT GOING TO RUN OFF TO BRAZIL AND LEAVE ME HERE, PETER! I'M GOING WITH YOU THIS TIME--!

PETER: SO, HARRIET--RALPH PHONED YOU!

7/ Closeup, both. Harriet looks uneasy. He regards her with suspicion.

HARRIET: NO...I...I CALLED YOU... TO ASK YOU TO TAKE ME OUT TO DINNER TONIGHT...RALPH TOLD ME YOU WERE TAKING HIM TO BRAZIL! I'M GOING WITH YOU, PETER...DO YOU HEAR..!

PETER: VERY WELL, HARRIET. WHATEVER YOU SAY...

PAGE FOUR 6-panel page

1/ See caption.

CAPTION: WITHIN A FEW WEEKS, PETER NELSON WAS READY TO LEAVE FOR THE AMAZON BASIN, FOR THE WILD COUNTRY OF THE HEADHUNTING JIVARO INDIANS. HE KNELT BEFORE HIS BELOVED DEBBY AND HELD HER CLOSE. HE LOOKED AWAY FROM HER TEARSTAINED FACE, LOOKED TO the HIRED LADY.

DEBBY: WHAT WILL I DO WITH YOU AND MOMMY GONE...SOB...I'LL HAVE NOBODY...

PETER: BUT YOU'LL HAVE MRS. FARLEIGH, DEAR, SHE'LL LOOK AFTER YOU AND LOVE YOU!

2/ See caption. Mrs. Farleigh gently holds Debby back as Peter picks up his luggage.

CAPTION: BEHIND PETER'S BACK HARRIET AND RALPH WAITED IMPATIENTLY.

PETER: I PROMISE WE WON'T BE GONE VERY LONG THIS TIME,DEBBY--AND I'LL BRING YOU A VERY SPECIAL PRESENT, YOU'LL SEE!

3/ Scene in hotel room. All three wear khaki shirts and shorts, long sox and calf-high lace-up leather boots.

CAPTION: THE TRIO FLEW TO RIO DE JANEIRO, WHERE THEY STAYED IN A HOTEL WHILE AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THEIR SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT.

PETER: IT'S DANGEROUS COUNTRY, HARRIET--DANGEROUS EVERY STEP OF THE WAY...WILD ANIMALS, PYTHONS. AND WORST OF ALL, HARRIET, THE JIVARROS. THEY'RE SAVAGES--

HARRIET: IF YOU'RE NOT AFRAID, WHY SHOULD I BE?

4/ See caption, dialogue.

CAPTION: PETER TURNED HOPEFULLY TO RALPH ABBOT...

PETER: RALPH, EXPLAIN TO HER THAT THE JIVARROS KNOW ME AND TRUST ME--THAT I KNOW JUST HOW TO HANDLE THEM.

RALPH: YOUR REASONS FOR HARRIET REMAINING HERE SOUND RATHER LAME, PETER--

HARRIET: I'VE MADE UP MY MIND. I'M GOING!

5/ See caption.

CAPTION: SO PETER NELSON WAS ACCOMPANIED ON THE LONG, TIRING TREK

THROUGH THE STEAMING"GREEN HELL" OF BRAZIL BY HALF-DOZEN PORTERS BEARING HIS EQUIPMENT AND TWO DUGOUTS FOR RIVER TRAVEL, BY HARRIET AND RALPH, AND BY HIS EVER GROWING SUSPICION THAT HIS WIFE AND ASSISTANT WERE LOVERS...

PETER: (thought) BEFORE THIS IS ALL OVER I'LL FIND OUT FOR SURE!

6/ Harriet looks into water (She's in boat with Peter, Ralph and several porters, who use poles for propulsion.

CAPTION: SOON THEY REACHED THE NAVICABLE WATERS OF THE AMAZON, AND THEIR PROGRESS BY BOAT WAS SWIFTER THAN LAND...

HARRIET: THIS HEAT IS MURDER! I WISH WE COULD STOP LONG ENOUGH TO TAKE A DIP IN THE RIVER..!

PETER: ONLY IF YOU WANT TO FEED THE FISH, MY DEAR! THE PIRRANHA WOULD STRIP YOU CLEAN OF FLESH IN A MINUTE!

PAGE FIVE

1/ Closeup, Peter looking cold, dangerous.

PETER: THERE ARE MANY DEADLY THINGS IN THIS JUNGLE. COUNTLESS PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO DISAPPEAR INTO IT... AND NEVER BE SEEN OR HEARD OF AGAIN!

2/ See caption.

CAPTION: IF IT WAS PETER'S PURPOSE TO SOUND OMINOUS, TO FRIGHTEN HARRIET AND RALPH, TO ALL APPEARANCES HE FAILED, FOR THAT PAIR DID NOT REACT WITH FRIGHT...

HARRIET: IF THE WORST HAPPENS, I'LL HAVE DIED WITH THE MAN I LOVE!

RALPH: I'M ENJOYING EVERY MOMENT OF THIS ADVENTURE, PETER! I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE CHANCE TO COME!

3/ Longshot of boats being poled along.

CAPTION: PETER SAT FOR A LONG TIME IN THOUGHTFUL SILENCE, EXAMINING EVERY WORD THEY HAD SAID...

PETER: (thought) WHAT DOES HARRIET MEAN "SHE'LL HAVE DIED WITH THE MAN SHE LOVES"? --WHICH MAN, RALPH OR ME?

4/ 5/ (wider panel) Jivarros meet party on shore. Native huts all about. Peter is engaged in conversations with their chief. Harriet and Ralph speak in a confidential tone in foregd.

CAPTION: WHEN AT LAST THEY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION, THE VILLAGE OF A LARGE JIVARRO SETTLEMENT, THE PARTY STEPPED ASHORE. [redacted] THE INDIANS APPROACHED--CAUTIOUSLY--WARRIORS FIRST, WITH THEIR LONG BLOW-GUNS AND CURARE-TIPPED DARTS. THEN THE CURIOUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN. AND WHILE PETER SPOKE WITH THEIR CHIEF IN THE JIVARRO TONGUE, HARRIET AND RALPH FOUND A MOMENT FOR PRIVATE WHISPERING...

HARRIET: I KNOW PETER LIKE A BOOK,RALPH--HE SUSPECTS US!

RALPH: PERHAPS. SO WHILE HE'S AROUND WE'LL BE PERFECTLY PROPER. WE'LL HAVE TO STAY AWAY FROM EACH OTHER WHILE WE'RE HERE.

6/ Harriet looks with revulsion at shrunken heads dangling by their hair from the belt of one of the warriors.

HARRIET: STAY AWAY! THEN I'M SORRY I CAME ALONG. LOOK AT THAT DISGUSTING CREATURE--AND THOSE HORRIBLE LITTLE CARVED HEADS DANGLING FROM HIS BELT...THEY'RE CHILLING!

RALPH: CARVED! THOSE ARE THE REAL THING--THE SHRUNKEN HEADS OF THEIR ENEMIES! THE JIVAROS HAVE A SECRET ANCIENT WAY TO SHRINK AND PRESERVE HUMAN FLESH!

7/ Peter, smiling happily, talks to Ralph and Harriet

CAPTION: SOON PETER CAME TO HIS ASSISTANT, AND HE LOOKED VERY HAPPY. AND WHEN HARRIET HEARD HIS NEWS, SHE LOOKED HAPPY, TOO...

PETER: THE CHIEF REMEMBERS ME. HE SAYS I'M HIS FRIEND, AND HE'LL COOPERATE IN ANY WAY I ASK! I'VE ASKED HIM TO LET ME VISIT THE ANCIENT JIVARRO BURIAL GROUNDS. HE AGREES, BUT ONLY I MAY GO...

PAGE SIX

1/ In a Jivarro hut. Ralph and Harriet are locked in passionate embrace.

CAPTION: RALPH WATCHED PETER DEPART FROM THE VILLAGE EARLY THE FOLLOWING MORNING. HARDLY HAD HE VANISHED FROM VIEW THAN HIS ASSISTANT HURRIED TO THE HUT WHERE HARRIET WAITED...

HARRIET: HOW I'VE PRAYED FOR THIS CHANCE TO BE ALONE WITH YOU,DARLING... TO BE SO CLOSE AND NOT BE ABLE TO...

RALPH: I KNOW...I KNOW, DEAREST.

2/ Both whirl, startled, to see sneering Peter in doorway, rifle in hand.

CAPTION: THEN A VOICE RANG OUT, SHARP, ANGRY--AND THEY WHIRLED AND SAW PETER STANDING IN THE DOORWAY. THE LOVERS WENT COLD--COLD IN THAT STEAMING JUNGLE...

PETER: NOW I KNOW,TOO. BUT I'VE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME NOW!

3/ See caption.

CAPTION: PETER LEVELED THE MUZZLE OF HIS RIFLE AT THEM AND SLOWLY COCKED THE HAMMER. FINALLY HARRIET OVERCAME HER PARALYSIS AND FOUND HER TONGUE...

HARRIET: I WAS LONELY, PETER...CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT... LONELY...

4/ Peter has returned home, and is sitting on the floor facing Debby, who is eagerly tearing open a package.

CAPTION: HAD PETER BEEN A LESS INTELLIGENT MAN HE MIGHT HAVE BLASTED THE LOVERS TO A BLOODY PULP AND BURIED THEM IN THE JUNGLE. BUT PETER DIDN'T SHOOT. HE RETURNED HOME WITH HARRIET AND RALPH, RETURNED AS HE ALWAYS DID WITH A GIFT FOR HIS BELOVED DEBBY...

PETER: CAREFUL WITH THAT PACKAGE, DARLING--IT MAY CONTAIN AN OLD TEDDY BEAR!

DEBBY: OH, I'LL BET IT DOESN'T!

5/ Debby has thrown her arms about her dad's neck; we don't see what he has given her.

DEBBY: OH, HOW WONDERFUL! YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD DADDY...

PETER: HERE, LET ME ARRANGE YOUR DOLLS THE WAY THEY SHOULD BE, DEBBY--

6/ We see Peter's hands (only his hands and wrists) withdrawing from dolls which he has placed in front of the dollhouse--the shrunken bodies of Harriet and Ralph, and they are embracing. Perhaps other dolls about the same size should be near for comparison of size; his hands in the scene would do the same.

CAPTION: PETER NELSON CAREFULLY PLACED THE SHRUNKEN BODIES OF HARRIET, HIS WIFE, AND RALPH, HER LOVER, IN FRONT OF DEBBY'S DOLLHOUSE. SENTIMENTALLY, HE HAD THEM EMBRACING, BUT WITH THEIR SEWN-UP LIPS THEY COULD NEVER KISS..!

7/ ON closing.

ON: HEE, HEE! WONDER IF DEBBY EVER CAUGHT ON THAT HER MOMMY WAS A MIDGET MUMMY? NOW IF ANY OF YOU KIDDIES WOULD LIKE A DOLL, I HAVE A JIVARRO PAL WHO'D BE GLAD TO--> No? HMPH! I ALWAYS SAY, NEVER LOOK A GIFT CORPSE IN THE MOUTH! AH, ME, THEN THIS IS GOODBYE, TILL I SEE YOU AGAIN IN (Name of Book).

THE END

COVER IDEAS FROM THE WOOD FILE

Late 1949 Harry Harrison and Wally Wood adapted *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* for Victor Fox's *Star Presentation* comics. Wood's files contain cover roughs for this title: *Daniel Webster, Dorian Gray*, and *Rip Van Winkle* (not pictured). The other roughs on these pages were probably done at the same time for the same publisher.

CARAVAN

CARAVAN

LOOK UPON THE KHOURAMI TREASURE, MON AMI.. LOOK WELL AT ALL THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN YOURS...

IT IS THE LAST THING YOU WILL EVER SEE!

PAY-OFF

THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES

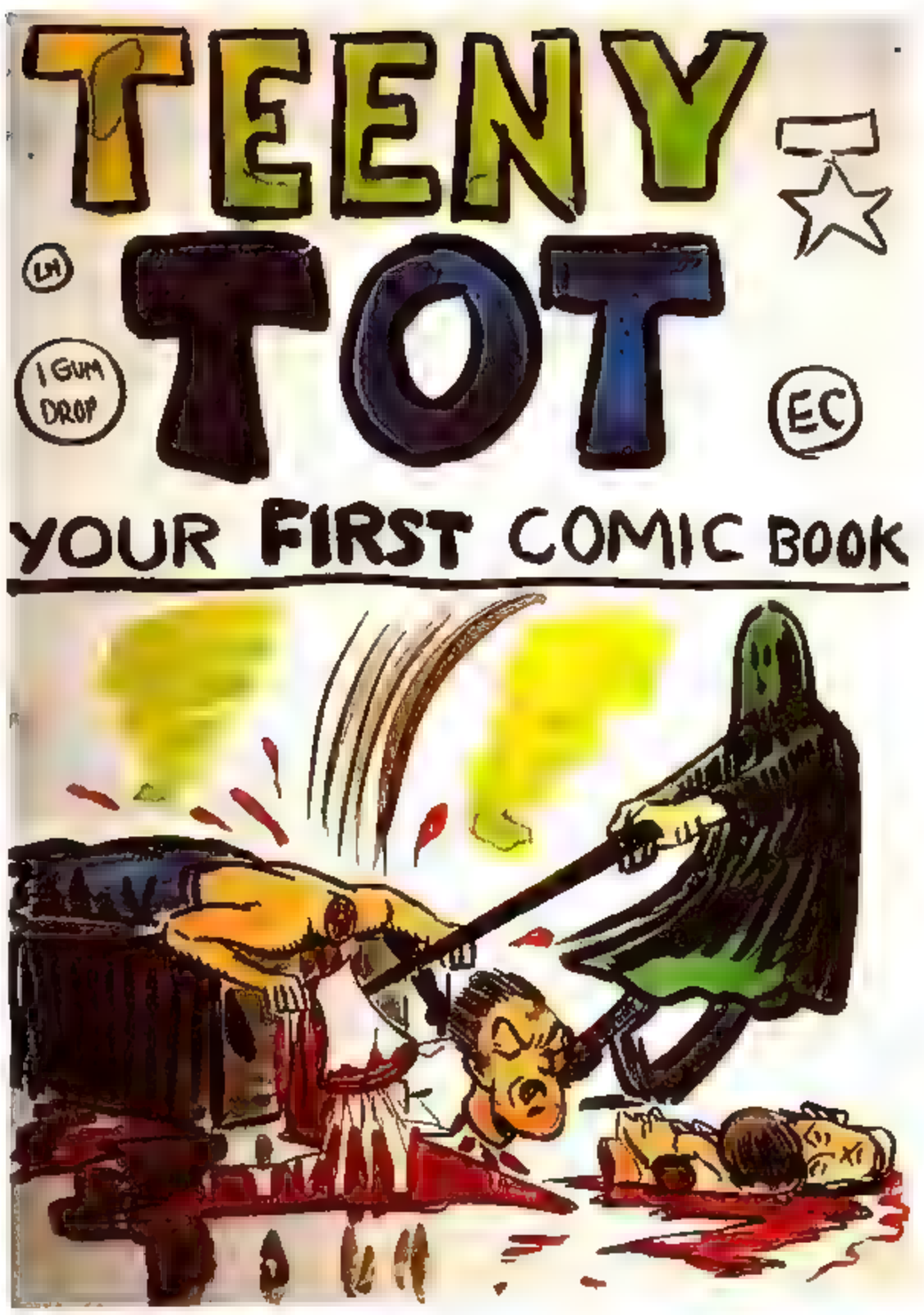
RAMROD

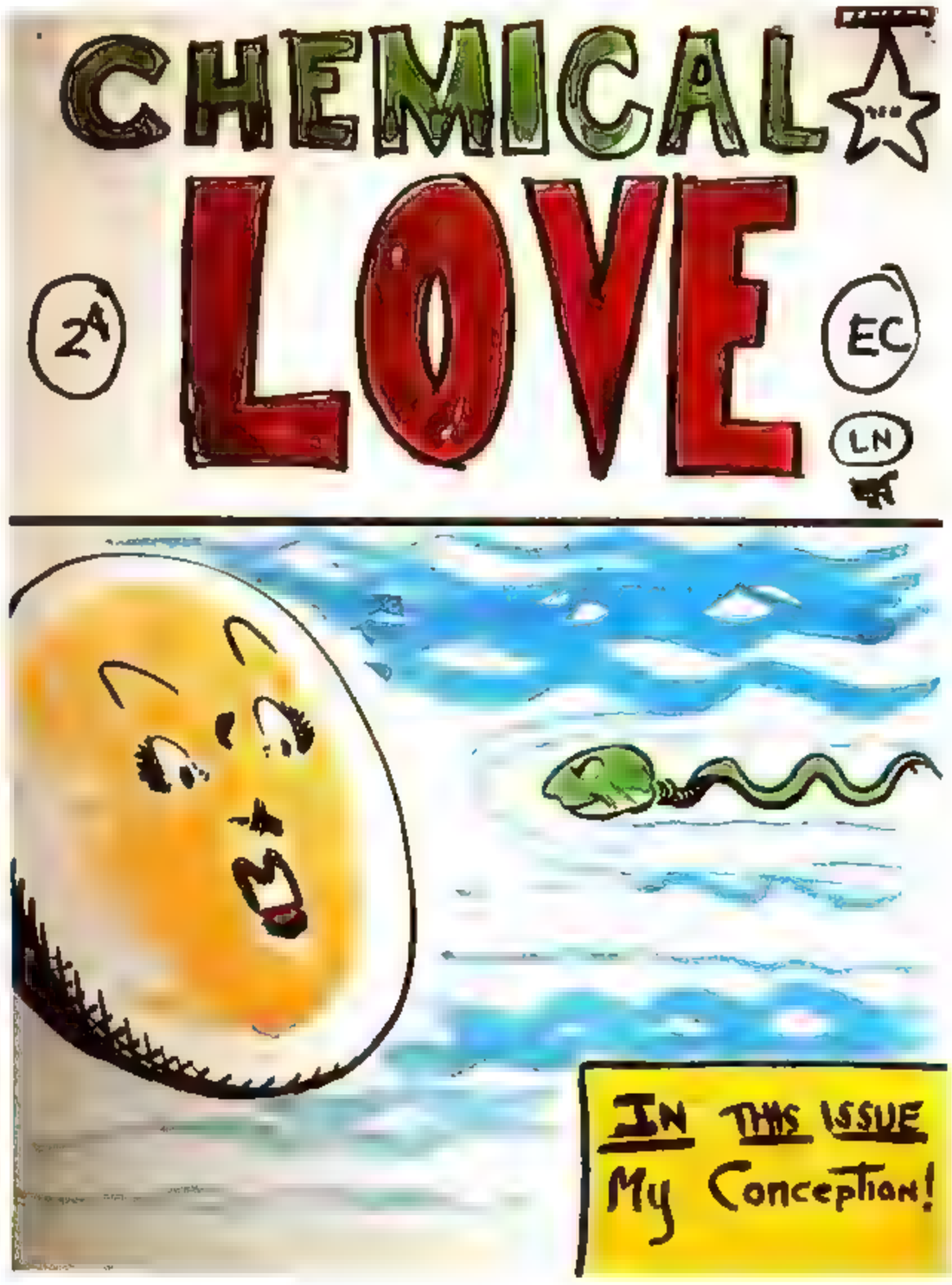
The PICTURE of
DORIAN GRAY

THE SECRET EC LINE

The EC era saw six Christmases—six Christmas parties where gag posters adorned the walls. We've seen these posters for 1951 (accompanying the Feldstein interview this issue), 1952 (Marie Severin's caricatures in the 1972 *EC Lives* convention program book), and 1955 (Marilyn Monroe, this issue). In 1953 and 1954 the subjects were: "what the staff really wanted for Christmas," a somewhat disappointing series by Kurtzman, and "what jobs they could get if EC went out of business"—conservative John Severin could run a Communist cell and clean minded Harvey Kurtzman could sell French postcards (a prophetic one that!). Some of the posters in these two series seem to be missing from Gaines' files.

Here, now, are the very first posters, for the 1950 party. Somehow, one can only imagine EC doing these remarkably uninhibited and unabashedly cynical cover parodies in their first year. As time went on they took their cynicism far more seriously—it was poured directly into the books they published!





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SADISTIC COMICS

APHRODISIAC LOVE

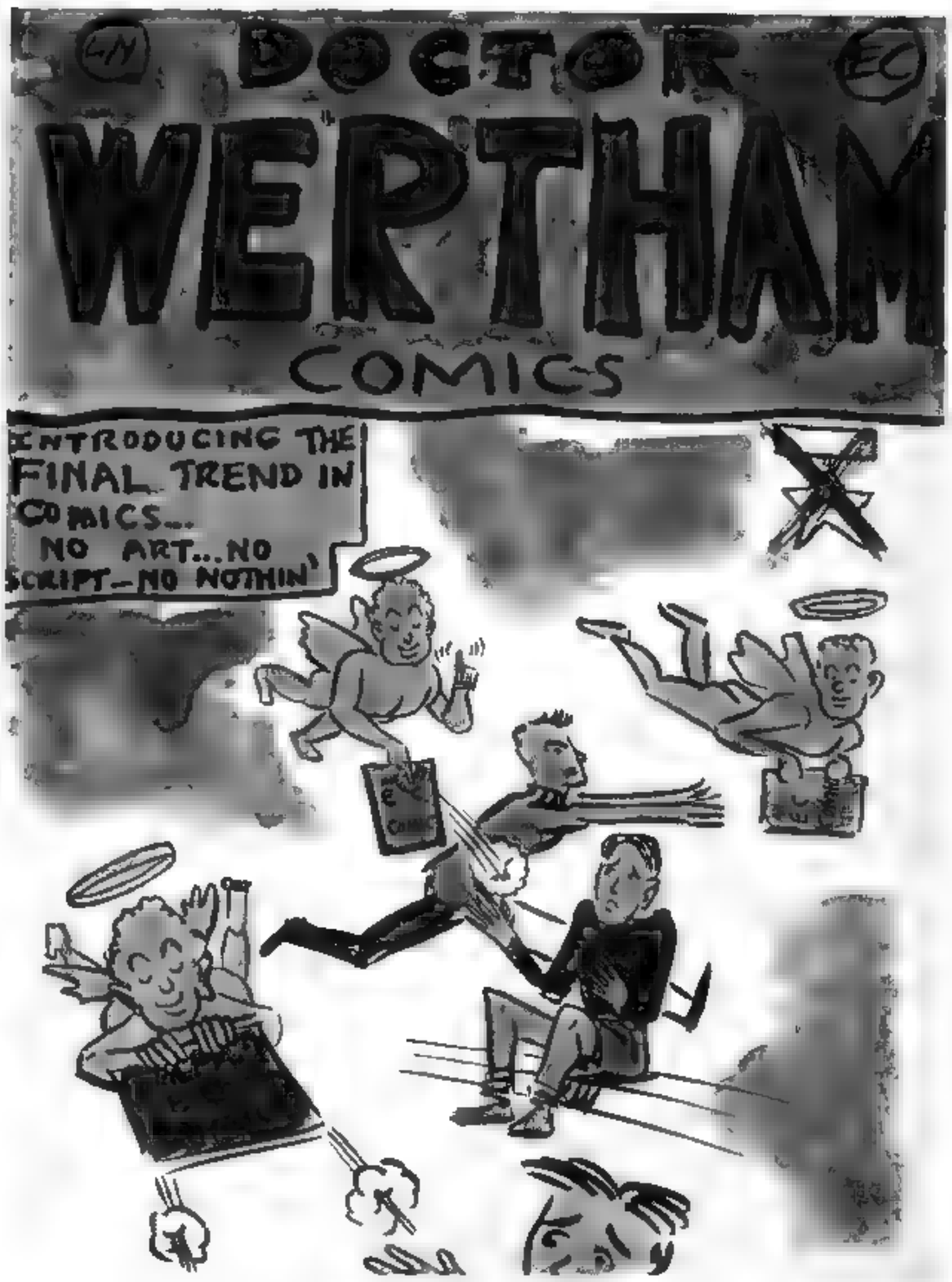
THE CRYPT OF CRAP

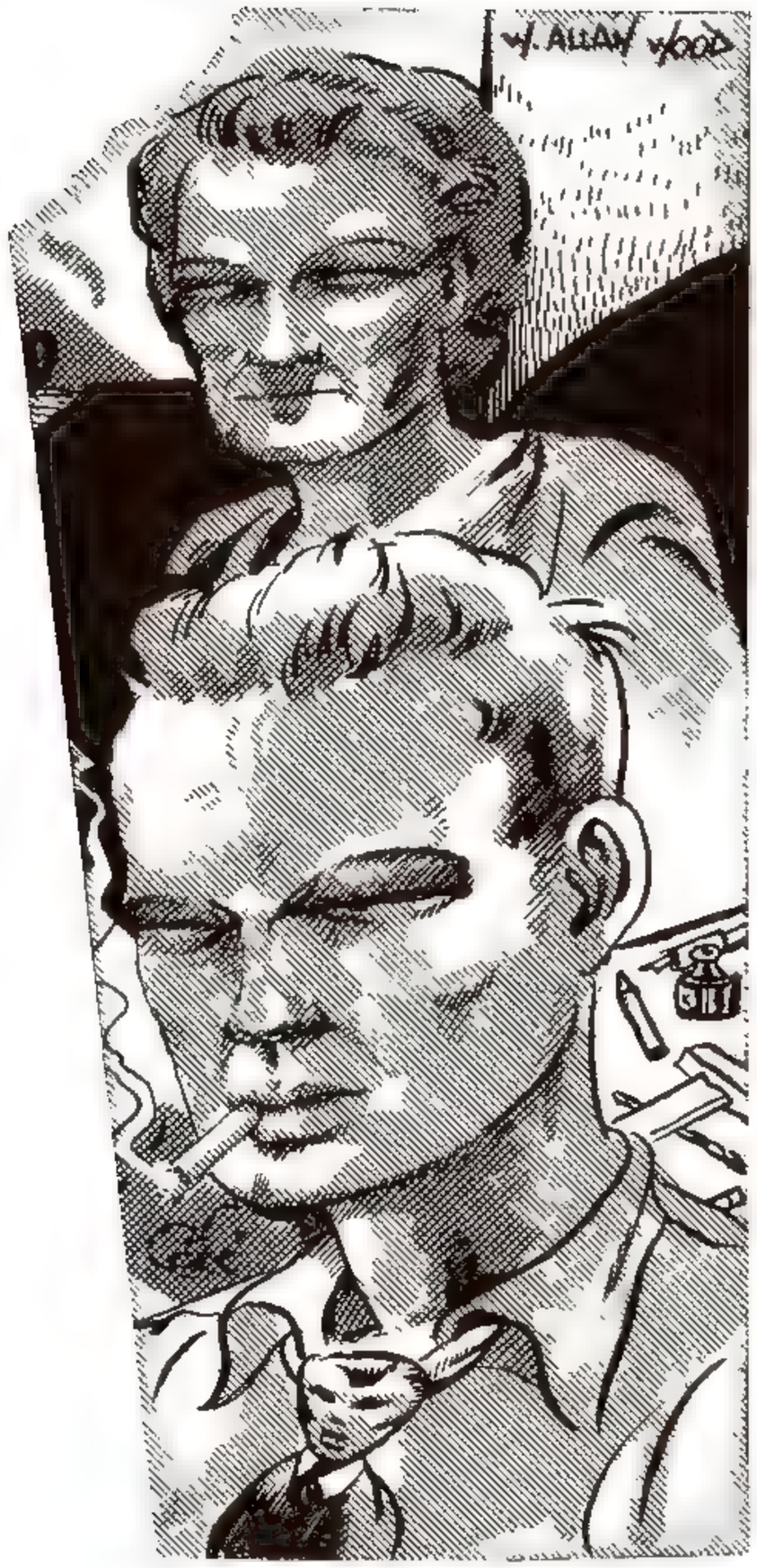
'GET THOSE DIRTY JEW COMICS

CRIME
DOES SO
PAY
39
EC
I KNOW!

BLOOD
COMICS
EC

MODERN
SEX
ADVENTURES
3
EC


DOCTOR
WERTHAM
COMICS
INTRODUCING THE FINAL TREND IN COMICS... NO ART...NO SCRIPT—NO NOTHIN'
EC



IN MEMORIAM

WALLACE WOOD

Wally Wood claimed that as a child he wrote and drew his own homemade comic books (hand-bound by his mother on her sewing machine) before there were such things as newsstand comic books to emulate! His last work was in the contemporary equivalent of the old crude pornographic eight-page comics. Between his avant-garde comic book start and his reactionary comic book end, Wally's life was an almost unbroken immersion in the form. In his early brash work at Avon and Fox, in his masterworks at EC and his action oriented Thunder Agents at Tower, through his own epics *Sally Forth* and *The Wizard King*—those strange combinations of genre work and uniquely personal vision—Wally lived and breathed in those little panels. When his contemporaries were making it big in advertising and slick magazines, Wally elected to stick it out with the comics. In many ways, both in his strengths and his weaknesses, in his good work and his bad, he was the quintessential comic book artist. There won't be another like him!

LETTERS

Next issue due late 1979 or early '80?
—Bill Spicer
Los Angeles, Ca.

Sure, Bill, sure . . .

Read your latest *Squa Tront* with interest, especially the transcript of the EC Con panels. I couldn't wait to see what I said next. You know, I don't remember saying any of that stuff.
—Woody
New Haven, Ct.

That Feldstein teen-age strip in pencil was a nice hit! Likewise the "Swipe File"—very termite!
Griffy
San Francisco, Ca.

I guess the transcripts of the EC panel was the outstanding feature of # 8, though, as usual, every article had something to recommend it. I've heard others remark on what they considered an anti-war bias in Kurtzman's war comics. They never struck me that way. Certainly not in the pacifist sense. If anything, Kurtzman's editorial stance was anti-stupidity. Of all the various enterprises that fall into this category war is, unquestionably, the most dramatic and therefore lends itself best to the entertainment format. Inevitably the anti-war comic (or film) must be a cheat of sorts, like the anti-crime story that supposedly deplores violence. If violence weren't exploited then nobody would bother to look. There wouldn't be any action.

Kurtzman's stories didn't lack for action. But there was no missing the point he was trying to get across. War is unglamorous. Sometimes it's even futile. But occasionally there is no other recourse. And I don't find the sentiments expressed in "Contact," the story with the patriotic speech, overdrawn, even after the Viet Nam bummer. Perhaps others would.

Interestingly enough, I came into the possession of a copy of *Shock Illustrated* # 3 by buying it off the stands. I understand that this was supposed to be highly unlikely, if not impossible. I bought it at Cooper's Book Store in Cleveland, Tenn. There was at least one other on the rack at the same time, probably more. I never cared for the Picto-Fiction experiment very much, so, on learning that a fellow connoisseur of the line lacked that issue making his collection complete, I made a gift of my only copy. At the time I didn't realize the reason he didn't have one. Evidently nobody had any copies because, in theory, it never really came out.
—Landon Chesney
Chattanooga, Tn.

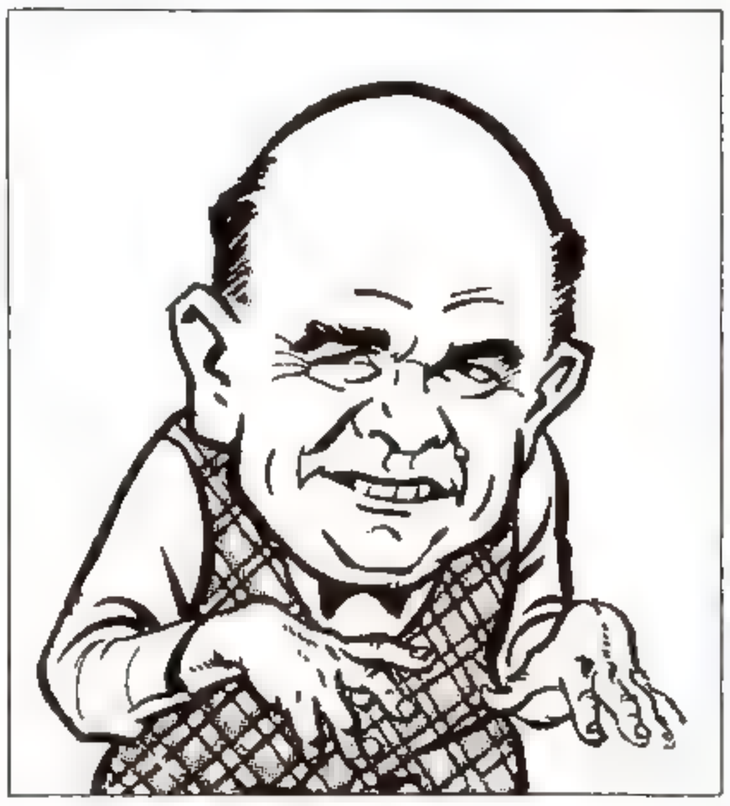
You're right, of course, about having to make war dramatic in your anti-war stories in order to reach an audience. Kurtzman once said something like, "You have to give them some entertainment for their dime." War itself is very dramatic, and people who have been more at pains than Kurtzman to present an anti-war message (you're also right about Kurtzman not being really anti-war) have worked against their goal with the drama of their material.

I think that Jean-Luc Godard solved this very difficult problem in Les Carabiniers. *He did it in many ways, but I recall particularly a scene where the two lead characters come into a house and terrorize a woman. They make her stand on a chair, and one lifts her dress with the bayonet at the end of his rifle. The men act so gross it's almost absurd, but he only raises her dress to just above her knees. It's totally unreal, a sort of blackout sketch, although the girl reacts in a realistic manner. Because he's done the scene without dramatic tension you're able to feel contempt for the men's actions and to see them from the woman's point of view. I recall an earlier film,* The Cat, *where a Nazi border officer grinned lewdly at Franciose Arnoul and suggested that he could have stripped her if he'd wanted to. Again, no nudity in the scene. But the scene was handled "realistically" and the sexual tension of the drama prevailed. Godard's "unrealistic" handling of his scene eliminated that conditioned response to the drama, and allowed for a more thoughtful, truer response to the violation taking place.*

Harvey Kurtzman made me such a relentless and disciplined researcher that I feel he was the big plus in all my days with Gaines.

There was the aptly named Mr. Vigilante, curator of the American History Room at the Fifth Avenue Library, whom I met through Harvey. God, you could really get involved in little-known American sagas while researching something specific there. Kurtzman said that was the "danger," and he was a willing sponge for extraneous information.

Then there was the historian/writer Fletcher Pratt, who checked out Harvey's Civil War series for accuracy. Pratt cited some "Quaker



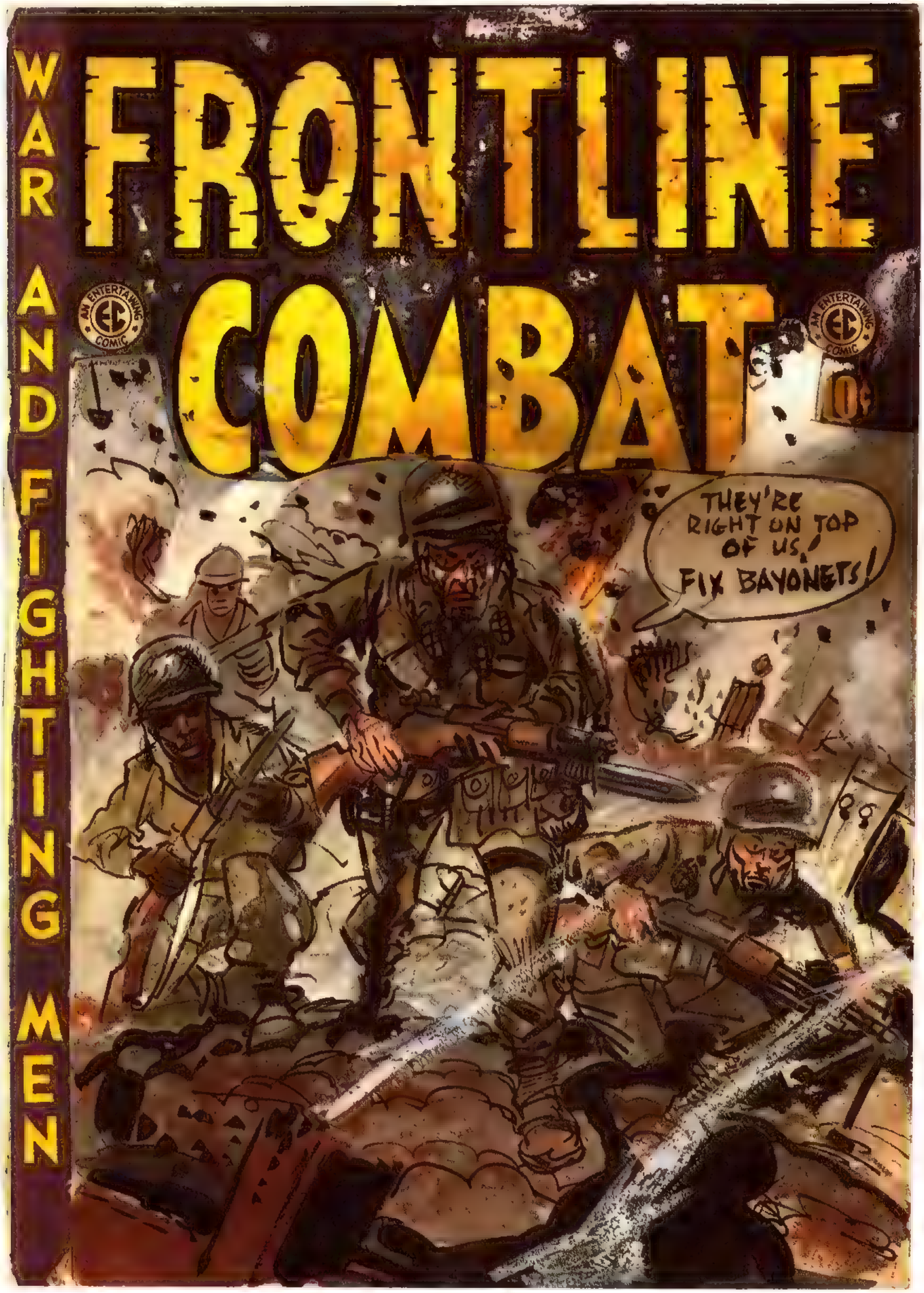
Self portrait from cover of "Wally" 1963 Treasure Chest

IN MEMORIAM

REED CRANDALL

Being an outstanding illustrator is not necessarily a prerequisite for being an outstanding comic book artist—it can even be a hindrance—and it's true that Reed Crandall's work often lacked the cartooning touch that nearly all the great comic creators have had. But Crandall made up for this with the strong storytelling ability that's always found in the work of the very best illustrators.

He was probably the finest draughtsman ever to work in comics—he could draw anything well and make the job look effortless. The field is filled with so-called "masters of the human figure," but few understand the effect of gravity on the body or how to portray a person's attitude and emotions through observant illustration as Crandall did. And his characters were skillfully integrated into fully realized settings. Crandall's graceful rendering, in a classical style unique to the comics field, was as striking as his drawing. Reed Crandall was a great talent who immeasurably enriched the field of comics.



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guns" in one Civil War encounter, logs that were tilted on a hillside to resemble an arc of cannons. Kurtzman never found another reference to it and Pratt confessed that it was just some palatable history he had made up.

I never liked going to Pratt's apartment. He had cages of marmosets that chattered and picketed me all the time I was there. Pratt would never show you out; just turn his back and go on with his work.

I particularly disdained his enhanced history. Being a submarine freak, I felt his charge about torpedo duds in encounters with the Jap fleet was a bum rap. He had written an article in a nebulous magazine promulgating the bizarre notion that so many American torpedoes fired at fat and sitting Jap convoys had been duds because the submariners were draining out the alcohol from the mechanisms and drinking it. Otherwise, the Jap convoys would have been sunk and "the war would have been greatly shortened."

Today, while investigating Pratt at the incomparable Jersey City Library (blessed because they don't throw anything away) I found another brilliant article by Pratt in *The Atlantic*, July 1950, "Torpedoes That Failed." He cites magnetic exploder failures and the ineffectual set of the firing pins. Also, the shabby research by our country on just how long a torpedo should run "hot" after having been released. I now see Pratt in the light of a good commercial writer who knew how to adjust for both schlock and esoteric markets.

The oft-repeated saga of Kurtzman arranging my descent on the U.S.S. Guardfish training sub was further colored today with the knowledge that the Guardfish was one of the frustrated carriers of dud torpedoes. On October 19, 1942, the Guardfish tracked a large Japanese freighter, under airplane escort, in the East China Sea. After a five hour approach, the sub fired four torpedoes; two ran under the target, the other two exploded prematurely before reaching it. The Guardfish was forced to dive to escape the counter-attacking planes.

You no doubt wonder why I'm going so far afield with this account. I guess it's belated evidence that I would have willingly "gone on forever" if publications such as *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* had endured.

Oh, yes, having mentioned those damn pesky marmosets of Fletcher Pratt, I noted that he wrote an article for *Harper*, June 1949, "Emily Post and the Marmosets."

That's when my curiosity faded.

—Jerry De Fuccio
Jersey City, N.J.

Squa Tront # 8. The cover is OK but not great. Inside front cover drawing OK but not great. Pages 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 are *A plus great!* Pages 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 are terrible. There is no EC feeling or mood there. Page 20 is *wonderfullllll!* Page 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 are great. Page 28 has a picture of some people who will never have anything to do with EC. If they ever do, they will have to go through a million changes. Page 29 is great. Page 30 has a picture of people and only two of them I am sure of, maybe only you. What do you think? Pages 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53 are all great. Page 54, 55, 56 are fine except anything that doesn't belong there. Page 57 is OK but not great. Pages 58, 59, 60, 61 and 62 are great. The inside back cover is OK but not great, but her tits are fine. The back cover is OK but not great. I feel the color on the covers could have been brighter and more colorfullll. Number 8 overall is a fine publication and I realize there is only so much that you have to work with. I want only *PURE EC!*

—Gary Arlington
San Francisco, Ca.

We weren't happy with the color on the covers either, Gary. For that matter, the print job on the whole book was terrible. Most of the interior art was terribly overinked. In particular, our apologies go to Al Williamson, since readers had no way of knowing that those large areas of black in his sketches were put there by the printer and not Williamson! This issue we've switched printers and are using special cover stock. Hope you notice the difference!

"Going Steady with Peggy" was a real find, and it was fascinating to see a whole story in pencil, with the Leroy lettering added . . . now if you could just unearth a copy of *The K.O. Punch*! "Swipe File" was priceless! I'm referring, of course, to the Orlando rip-off—what language was that? Tagalog? In any case, "Anna . . . (hiksi) Anna!" and "Diyos ko! . . . Kakh!" have both become permanent additions to my vocabulary.

I found the ECFA con panel transcriptions pretty depressing. Most of those guys seemed unwilling to express any serious feelings about their work . . . maybe they were just embarrassed, maybe you had to be there to feel it, maybe they just never had any to begin with. Diyos Ko! Kakh!

—Bill Mason
Montreal, Quebec

For your fans who are interested, "The Frazetta Collector" was sort of a fanzine within a fanzine! When Jerry Weist decided to publish *Squa Tront* he wanted to take advantage of anything that he could in order for the 'zine to sell and Frazetta was just coming into his own at the time. Jerry approached me about doing something on Frazetta because of my interest, research and collection of Frazetta art and memorabilia. I agreed to do "The Frazetta Collector" for him if I had full control of editorial content, to which he agreed (to his chagrin later as he and I didn't agree on certain philosophies). Anyway, when Jerry decided to discontinue editing *Squa Tront* I decided that it was time to put "The Frazetta Collector" to rest. Frazetta's popularity was skyrocketing and he was beginning to be ripped off by several publishers and Ellie and Frank wanted more control over what was being published, and (rightfully so) wished payment for the publication of his art. Although I had many originals which had never been published and would have been well within my rights to publish them if I chose—I decided that Ellie and Frank had a right to decide whether these pieces ever were published or not. And that is the way it remains.

I wrote one other installment to "The Frazetta Collector" for Middle Earth (they asked me if I would) about the many young artists who have been influenced by Frank's style. The Middle Earth people elected not to publish it as they dealt with many of the artists I was writing about and I was somewhat unflattering to several of them.

In regards to Michael Oliveri's comment that Frazetta did part of "Came the Dawn" for Warren: this is untrue! On several occasions Frank tried to interest Warren in publishing it if he would finish it. Warren showed little interest in the project so Frank did nothing with the story. The last time I saw the original art it was in a very bad state. Frank had tried to pull the pages from under a rather heavy stack of art and the art couldn't stand the strain: huge chunks were torn out of the pages—several of which have since become lost. I'm afraid that what was published in the *Frazetta Memory Book* may be all that is ever published of this work.

I'm very pleased that you are continuing to publish *Squa Tront* and look forward to future issues. I think # 8 is the best issue that you've published since you took the magazine over, although I enjoyed the Roy Krenkel issue also. Of course I prefer the first four issues but then I was intimately connected with them. Your issues have a far different personality—cooler, more professional—but then that is/was to be expected.

—Robert Barrett
Wichita, Ks.

Readers should note that three panels of the elusive "Came the Dawn" have just been printed in Frank Frazetta—The Living Legend *from Sun Litho-Print/Frazetta Prints, one of which was also in the* Memory Book.

About two weeks ago I was finally able to get *Squa Tront* #'s 1 and 2. I'll have to say that, allowing for the times, they were really good 'zines, but they *pale* in comparison to #'s 3-8. It was upon reading these that I really gained appreciation for what you've done with the mag. The Weist issues were good, make no mistake, but they were done so . . . so amateurishly. They joke around too much, fail to take themselves seriously. Perhaps your greatest accomplishment with *Squa Tront* is publishing a mag that seriously and intelligently talks about the EC line. I'm not saying that it's a cardinal sin to put a few jokes in your mag, but failing to take yourself seriously can ruin it.

As students of comics history know, Bill Gaines' father M.C. (Max) Gaines was head of the "All American" unit of DC comics in the early forties. Although the Donenfeld "Superman" half of DC was housed uptown, M.C. Gaines ran his line downtown at 225 Lafayette Street in Rooms 705 through 709. M.C. himself was in Room 706. Shelly Mayer, editor of the line and creator of Scribbly, *was in Room 709. Gaines senior used these offices to publish his Educational Comics after he separated from DC, and, of course, his son eventually published Entertaining Comics in these same offices, although by that time the suite had shrunk to just Rooms 705 and 706.*

Young Bill Gaines (aged 19 in 1941) used to go down to the offices and hang out. In those days there were old fashioned Italian pushcarts on Lafayette Street, and Shelly Mayer, Bill and another young fellow named Harold, who was a vegetarian, would go down at lunchtime and buy a big bag of vegetables for a quarter and munch on them through the afternoon.

Irwin Hasen, later the artist on the Dondi *newspaper strip for many years but in 1941 a junior member of the All American unit, has preserved images of the staff of those days in this Christmas message to his boss. Harold is obviously the fellow with the carrot. The young lady with the halo is M.C.'s niece—Bill's cousin—Evelyn Gaines. She used to write text pages in the comics under the name, as Bill recalls, of "Evelyn Lovelace." The stumpy fellow on the phone is of course M.C. Gaines. Shelly Mayer is standing with his back to us smoking a pipe, and Irwin Hasen is tugging at his pantleg. The older man with a pipe to the right of Mayer is probably Everett Hibbard, artist for* The Flash, Green Lantern *and other features (although the man at the top next to Harold might be Hibbard). The tall man at the bottom pointing into Room 709 is Max Liebowitz, co-publisher Jack Liebowitz's younger brother. Frank Kiernan, mentioned in the text, worked at Photochrome, the engravers. M.C. had a direct line to Photochrome, he called them so often. The whole poem is a cryptic description of an actual series of events. M.C. framed it, and it hung in the offices for several years.*

Are you still planning that all-Severin issue? It's nice to have an issue devoted to one single artist, but I wish you'd pick more popular ones. To be frank with you, Severin is my *worst* EC artist.

—Philip Smith
San Diego, Ca.

That's the story of my life, publishing material about artists that I like but the fans don't. But, yes, we're still working on that all-Severin issue, although it will probably be for Panels, *not* Squa Tront.

Regarding your comparison of the current Squa Tront *with those published under Jerry Weist's editorship—would you believe you're the first reader who's even indicated an awareness of the change in editorship in the seven years since it occurred! Obviously I liked what Jerry did—enough to continue the title. But remember that Jerry was about 16 when he started* Squa Tront, *and that those were different times. For a current top notch example of his publishing work, see the* R. Crumb Checklist *from the Boatner Norton Press.*

Of particular interest to me is the series on EC fanzines—and, by extension, EC fandom in the fifties. It's hard to realize that 25 years have gone by, and yet of course today I am almost wholly a different person, enjoying very different circumstances in my life. How incredible that the output of one small comics publisher for a few years in the early 1950's could have so profound an effect upon our lives!

You know, I always had a foot in two different worlds, back then. I was a comics fan—a very serious comics fan, written up by the Washington *Daily News* and the wire services as "The Boy with Ten Thousand Comics"—but I was also a science fiction fan. For much of that time there was surprisingly little overlap. Most sf fans looked down their

A VISIT FROM M.C.

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE DEADLINE, WITH THE CITY ASLEEP
AND IN 709 THEY WERE WORKING SIX DEEP
THE DUMMYS WERE HUNG ON THE WALL FOR NEXT DAY,
IN THE HOPES THAT **M.C.** WOULD GIVE HIS OKAY!
THE CHILDREN HAD PUT DOWN THE COMICS THEY READ
WHILE VISIONS OF SUPERMAN DANCED THRU' THEIR HEADS!
AND **SHELDON** ALL BUSY, A PIPE 'TWIXT HIS LIPS,
HAD JUST SETTLED DOWN TO READING HIS SCRIPTS.
WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN THE BUZZER DID BLARE
AND ALMOST KNOCKED **HIBBARD** OUT OF HIS CHAIR;
MAC SCREAMED OUT LIKE AN OLD SICKNENED PARROT,
AND I SAW **HAROLD** CHOKE ON A NEWLY SHAVED CARROT!
WHEN TO MY WANDERING EYES SHOULD APPEAR,
SEVEN TALL FIGURES I SAW THEM SO CLEAR,
BEING LED BY A MAN WHO KEPT LOOKING AT ME.
I KNEW IN A MOMENT IT MUST BE **M. C.!**
I RECOGNIZED ALL FROM THE FRUITS OF THEIR FAME
AS HE WHISTLED AND SHOUTED AND CALLED THEM BY NAME,
"NOW **LANTERN**, NOW **WILDCAT**, NOW **FLASH**, NOW **THUNDER**,
ON **SCRIBBLEY**, ON **SARGON**, ON **MIDNITE**, AND **WONDER!**
SNAP IT UP BOYS WE MUSN'T BE LATE
I'VE GOT TO PICK UP A FOUR COLOR PLATE!"
ALL UP TO PHOTOCHROME THE CHARACTERS FLEW,
THE **JUSTICE SOCIETY** AND OLE **M.C.** TOO
I LISTENED OUTSIDE LOUD SHOUTS TOLD ME WELL,
THAT FAITHFUL **FRANK KIERAN** WAS GONNA GET HELL!

THEN AS I DREW IN MY HEAD AND WAS TURNING AROUND,
UP ON MY DESK, M.C. CAME WITH A BOUND!
HE WAS DRESSED IN A COSTUME THAT WAS REALLY A PIP!
WITH A LONG DECEASED DUN HILL DROOPED ON HIS LIP!
HE WAS CHUBBY AND PLUMP, YET STOOD HERE ERECT
HE YELLED TO HIGH HEAVEN BUT I BOWED IN RESPECT
"GET ME **BRIDGEPORT**-" HE SCREAMED," THEN GET ME **FRANK**
LAY THESE OUT **HAROLD** THEN GO TO THE BANK!
GET ME THE **PRESIDENT** NO, GET ME HIS **WIFE**
TELL HER I'LL PUBLISH A BOOK ON HER LIFE!
WIRE **ORSE WELLES,** ASK HIM HOW'S ABOUT IT!
IF WE PUT HIM IN THERE, WE WON'T BE TOO CROWDED!"
THEN HE SMILED FOR A MINUTE, AND THE WINK IN HIS EYE,
TOLD ME M.C. WAS A REGULAR GUY!
THEN HE SPRANG TO HIS FLOCK, AND GAVE A SHRILL WHISTLE
AND AWAY THEY ALL FLEW LIKE THE DOWN OF A THISTLE!
BUT I HEARD HIM EXCLAIM AS HE DROVE OUT OF SIGHT,
"HAPPY CHRISTMAS KIDS-AND TO ALL A GOODNITE!"

-TO MY BOSS-
AND A SWELL BOSS AT THAT!
IRWIN HASEN - 1951-

Illustration copyright © 1983 William M. Gaines.

noses at comics—and with some justification. After all, sf fandom had been given a bad name (as had sf itself) by the public media association of science fiction with "Superman" and "Buck Rogers," which were very bad sf, irrespective of their merits as comics. (Today the real sf fan resents the *Star Trek/Star Wars*/"sci-fi" associations pinned on sf by the media.)

So I felt I had to justify my interest in sf to comics fans, and my interest in comics to sf fans, in both cases dealing with people who were hostile to my "other" interest.

The comics fans I "hung out" with—via the mail, mostly—were every bit as intelligent and interesting as the sf fans I knew (and most of them, like Larry Stark, Bhob Stewart and Fred von Bernewitz, moved in both worlds as I did), but there were others, with whom my contacts were more peripheral, who were less literate (if not less intelligent), more a part of their culture (we were mostly alienated loners), and generally younger and less mature (at least then), and I felt much less kinship with them, which is why despite my apparent (after the fact) prominence in EC fandom, I was never very deeply involved in many of the EC fanzines, nor contributed much to them. I knew then that a good deal more was going on than I was actually involved in.

Perhaps that's why I never had any ambitions to become a professional in comics. (In the sixties Stan Lee wanted me to write for Marvel, but the closest I came to it was the Captain America book for Bantam.)

Certainly my one contact with EC fans, *en masse*, was traumatic. You reported that quite accurately ["The EC Fanzines: Part 2," *Squa Tront* # 7].

Speaking of accuracy, I have been staring at the photo on the bottom of page 8, *Squa Tront* # 8, trying to figure out *who* the figure staring at the book was—because it quite positively is *not* Larry Stark. Larry didn't look at all like that. My opinion, after searching my memory and looking at photos of people at the 1972 EC Convention (which I'm really sorry, now, that I missed), is that it might be Jerry De Fuccio. I know we met Jerry there, and I can't think of anyone else more likely than he.

It's odd, is it not, how these things can come full circle. Now, twenty-five years later, I find myself the editor of the one "comic book" which has the potential to fulfill the early EC promise for comics. And my position

The ghosts of Christmas past, from a Reed Crandall Christmas card.

here has brought me back into contact once again with my old friends, Larry Stark and Bhob Stewart. (Fred von B and I have maintained a sometimes tenuous but never non-existent contact all these years.)

Bhob is writing a column for *Heavy Metal* now, and I've offered Stark—who just compiled an Index to the first 30 issues of HM, and is freshly excited about the magazine—a free sub in return for detailed letters of critical comment, just like the old days at EC. I can't tell you how pleased I was to do that!

Great galloping gobs of nostalgia!

Your *Squa Tronts* are excellent magazines, John, and I appreciate them more on each occasion that I return to them. But my problem—and perhaps by extension *your* problem as well—is that your publications are so superbly done, so self-contained, so *finished* in their appearance, that I find myself left with little to say in comment on them, which is why this is my first letter of comment.

—Ted White
New York, N.Y.
[written when editor of *Heavy Metal*]

You're right, that photo in Squa Tront *# 8 is incorrectly captioned. The person in the picture is neither Larry Stark nor Jerry De Fuccio, but, according to Fred von Bernewitz, was another fan who happened to be in the EC offices at the same time that you were. The picture was taken by Larry Stark, as were the other two on the page.*

As a matter of interest, I am the mysterious Canadian EC fan who wrote Fred von Bernewitz from Paris, France, returning his early EC fanzines ["Part 4," *Squa Tront* # 8].

I am especially interested in Severin and Elder material. With the Cochran reprints we are getting to see how good they were!

—Carl Heywood
Kingston, Ont.

One bit of information that could have been added to the fanzines series ["Part 3," *Squa Tront* # 8] was that the first issue of *The EC World Press* was a one sheet newsletter. I'm sure of this, since I once saw a copy of it.

—Dick Voll
Newberg, Or.

This may be a good place to correct my remarks in Squa Tront *# 5 regarding* The EC Slime Sheet, *which I described as "a minor effort." I've since seen copies of the first and third issues, and, its title not withstanding, it was a pretty good fanzine. Though Ernie Crites was "Editor-in-cheif" (sic) of the first issue, Jim McCawley wrote most of it, and by the third issue Crites was out of the picture entirely. McCawley had a mature viewpoint and a sophisticated range of interests and was one of the more interesting fan writers of that time.* Slime Sheet *had an interview with Gaines (the result of Chicago-based McCawley's in person visit to EC), some autobiographical comments from Bernie Krigstein, and lots of news and comments about comic book censorship. McCawley's "Postgraduate Semantics Seminar" discusses Potrzebie, giving its true meaning in Polish and making a tongue-in-cheek complaint of EC's grammatic misuse of the word.*

I should also amend my statement in Squa Tront *# 5 that "the very first fan publication about comics was Ted White's* The Story of Superman . . . *in the Summer of 1952." In* The Duckburg Times *# 14, April 1982, Malcom Willits describes in detail a mimeographed publication about comics called* Collector's News *that he and Jim Bradley put out in 1947!*

Squa Tront is the best fanzine I've ever read. The art is so good you don't even have to read the articles.

—Jacques Dutry
Aire/Adour, France

In the EC Convention transcripts, Kurtzman quoted some Korean, supposedly from "Combat Medic" in *Frontline Combat* # 4. I checked that story and couldn't find anything like that. In looking through other issues I discovered that the bit of Korean dialogue that he was quoting from memory is from "Luck" in *Two-Fisted Tales* # 27—"E orarul chil cha sik."

—Allen Ketcham
New York, N.Y.

I recently saw an article on EC in the German fanzine *Comixene*, and either their research is very poor or Roger Hill's artwork is very fine. They printed and described his artwork, the imagined cover of *Haunt of Fear* # 29 [from *Squa Tront* # 2], as Graham Ingels' work!

—Peter Mikkelsen
Copenhagen, Denmark

Man, I love my old E.C. comics! EC was one of the great things of my childhood. I was 12 years old in 1953, which landed me just about right. When I was about 13, I went to EC's offices; that was one of the great events of my childhood. (I got autographs on EC stationery of Feldstein and Craig.) I also have a stupendous letter with drawings that George Evans sent me.

I like *Squa Tront* too. I'd like to see you all have a greater proportion of material about the actual EC comics themselves. The peripheral stuff like the early fanzines and Krenkel's *Creepy* covers are good too, but the Krigstein issue was great. It was *all* about the actual EC issues.

I have the highest regard for Kurtzman and what he did with EC War/adventure. If this letter has a lot about Kurtzman and EC War, it's because I think War/adventure was the second best EC genre after sci-fi. Kurtzman may have been restrictive to his artists, but the results were worth it. There wouldn't have been an overall EC War panel "style," with the cinematic views and cinematic sequencing of panels, without a single overall—and therefore restrictive—viewpoint. I liked his prose style, too. *Piracy*, *Valor*, and *Aces High* should have been the blood-line successors to *Frontline* and *Two-Fisted*, but without K. at the helm, they

weren't. *Valor* could have even continued the Civil War series.

I was the one who asked Kurtzman at the EC Convention war panel if it was a "conscious decision" to go from the gory stories in the earlier issues of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* to the not-so-gory ones later. (At least I *think* I asked that question. I know I had planned to.) Kurtzman's answer more or less was that it was neither conscious nor unconscious.

I guess the "conscious decision" notion is a pet theory of mine. Because when you look through the comics, you see that *FC* 1-7 were all full-fledged gory, with the main character in two or three stories per issue dying. *FC* # 8 and # 9 (# 9 was the first Civil War ish) were sort of transitional issues, and *FC* 10 was practically lillies and roses with the Willy-and-Joe wise-cracking of the GI's at the end. Similarly the last gory *TFT* was # 28 which was July-Aug 1952, which corresponds exactly with *FC* 7. Then # 29 was transitional, and # 30 and all the rest thereafter were fairly nice. I don't think Kurtzman sat down one day and said, "Starting right now, we've got to lighten up," but once the change started, it was rapid. He stopped having people with that crazed look, too! (That was one thing that really made me hide ECs from my parents.) And in the WW I air ace stories, when the ace died, it didn't seem so personal, because the story was told in a historical, documentary, detached manner. So the changeover occurred fairly rapidly, although I admit I could be somewhat forcing an interpretation that isn't quite 100% there.

While looking through my war issues, I noticed a few other interesting things:

The covers of *Frontline* # s 1-5 all center around a different modern weapon—in # 1, it's a tommy gun; # 2, a tank; # 3, a machine gun; # 4, a recoilless rifle; and # 5, a rifle and bayonet. None of these are taken too directly from any scene in the issues. Starting with # 6 (the best all around issue, in my estimation), all the covers relate to something in the contents of the issues.

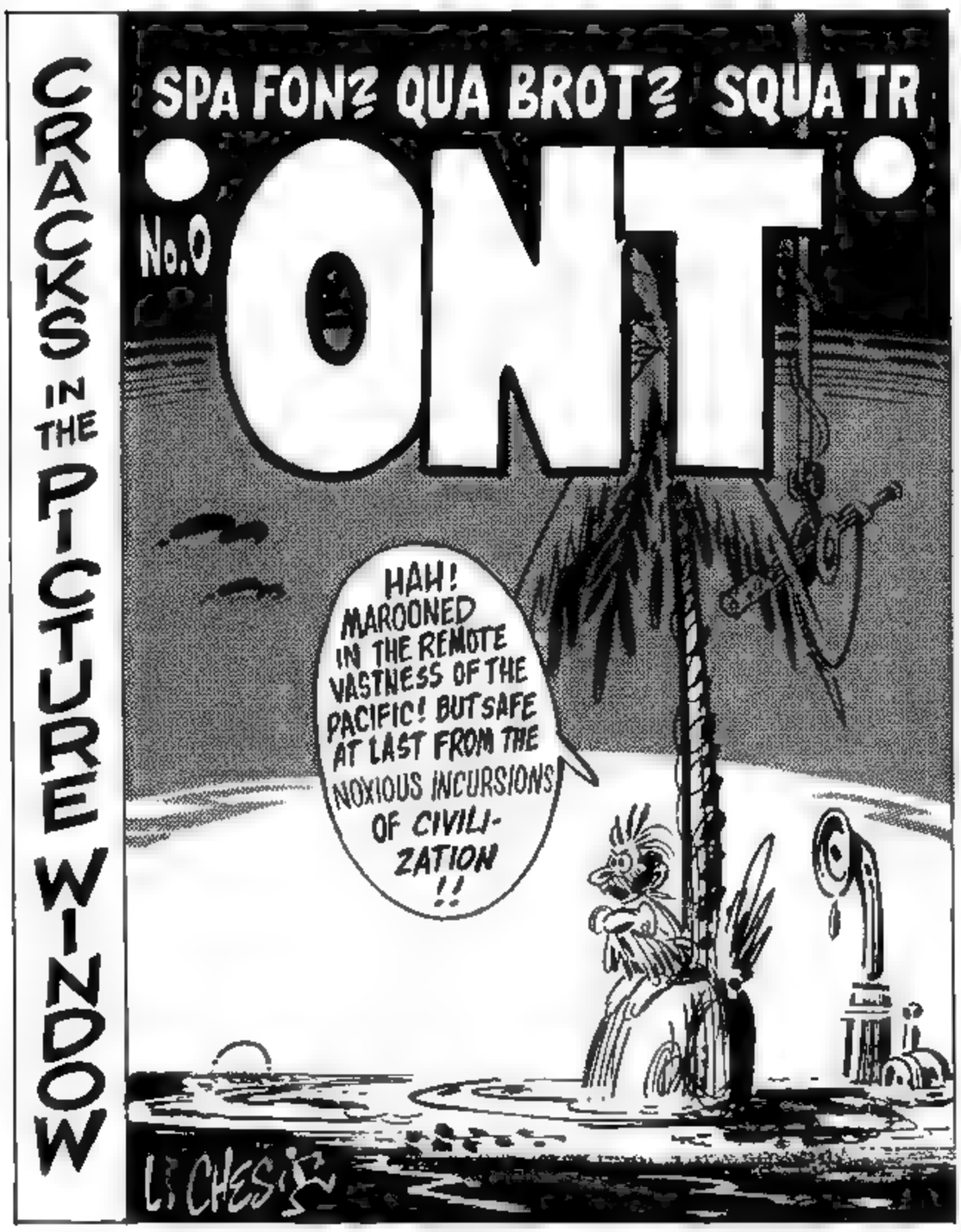
For all Kurtzman's attention to correct portrayal of guns, he didn't notice that Wally Wood, who is nonetheless my favorite EC war/adventure artist, didn't know how a flintlock rifle mechanism worked in "Bunker Hill" (*TFT* 25), especially p. 3. Wood shows a gun's hammer in the "unfired" position even when the gun has just been fired, as evidenced by the puff of smoke. And he shows the frizzen in an intermediate position, neither fired nor unfired. The frizzen is that little piece of metal that sticks up and is sort of opposite the hammer. Look in Severin's "Alamo" (*TFT* 28), p.6, for the correct sequencing of hammer and frizzen positions. The hammer is supposed to strike the frizzen (to make sparks) and pop it up. Wood's vague way of drawing all this continued on into *Piracy*. Crandell, however, in *Piracy*, drew the hammer and frizzen letter-perfect. But all that's okay; in the White Indian stories, which were also set in flintlock (Revolutionary) times, Frazetta usually didn't even draw the frizzen at all! You may be thinking it might be neat to have an article titled "The Guns of E.C." where you cover all this; but really it's pretty elementary, and anyone who's interested could get it a lot better from any library book covering the history of firearms.

There have been a few other interesting gun errors. In "Gettysburg," when the older soldier muzzle-loads the rifle, he forgets to put a percussion cap (also called a primer; it's like a little inverted thimble) in the nipple, which is down at the breech end of the rifle barrel. (The gun won't fire without a new cap.) And in "Stonewall Jackson," the use of the "Perry carbine" identification is a little off kilter, I believe. According to the most authoritative book on antique guns (it's like *The Comic Book Price Guide*), the Perry carbine was used by the U.S. Navy apparently and is sometimes *mistaken* for the Confederate-used *Tallahassee* carbine, to which it bears a resemblance. Mistaking a Tallahassee for a Perry (or vice versa) is a mistake a modern day collector may make, not a Confederate soldier within the Tallahassee's field of use.

You may do an all-Severin issue? I don't think that's such a great idea. Severin doesn't have the splash and dash of the best EC artists—or the detail that the non-splashy ones like Crandell were capable of at their best. The Krigstein issue was very fine. It pointed out things about Krigstein's art I'd never noticed before. I don't think there's anything hidden in Severin's art to point out. He doesn't have the unique and/or weird vision of Krigstein, Wood, Williamson, Ingels, etc. Sure, he's great with guns, uniforms, costumes, but there's just not enough personal style in his art to warrant a special issue. If you do something on Severin, you might point out the story "Code of Honor" in *TFT* 41. On p.2, he very accurately shows a wheellock firearm. And on Panel 1, p.3, he shows a Colt Patterson revolver, which I think was the first large-scale-production revolver (i.e. a gun with a revolving cylinder for multiple shots before reloading). You could also mention that Alamo story where Severin accurately shows the firing sequence of a flintlock mechanism. But all this doesn't make him an *artist*, just an astute researcher. His drawing just isn't that groovy. If he didn't work for EC, I doubt if you'd be all that keen on him; although I have really liked his work for Warren; it's such a change of pace from other Warren artists.

On the other hand, there were a few artists of that early 1950's period who should have worked for EC but didn't, such as Lou Fine, Everett Raymond Kinstler, of course more Frazetta, Torres, and Sid Check—and Gerald McCann. McCann, if you don't know him, is the guy who worked for Hillman and Avon and had the heavy, almost primitive, inking style. At his best, he created a fine moody, Gothic atmosphere, and his conception of the

This pencilled sample page is said to be the one that Joe Orlando used to land his job at EC!


CRACKS IN THE PICTURE WINDOW
SPA FONZ QUA BROTZ SQUA TR
No.0
ONT
HAH! MAROONED IN THE REMOTE VASTNESS OF THE PACIFIC! BUT SAFE AT LAST FROM THE NOXIOUS INCURSIONS OF CIVILI-ZATION !!
L. CHESNEY

John "ERUDITE" BENSON
205 W. 80th ST.
N.Y. N.Y. 10024

Dec 7 '78

Dear John—

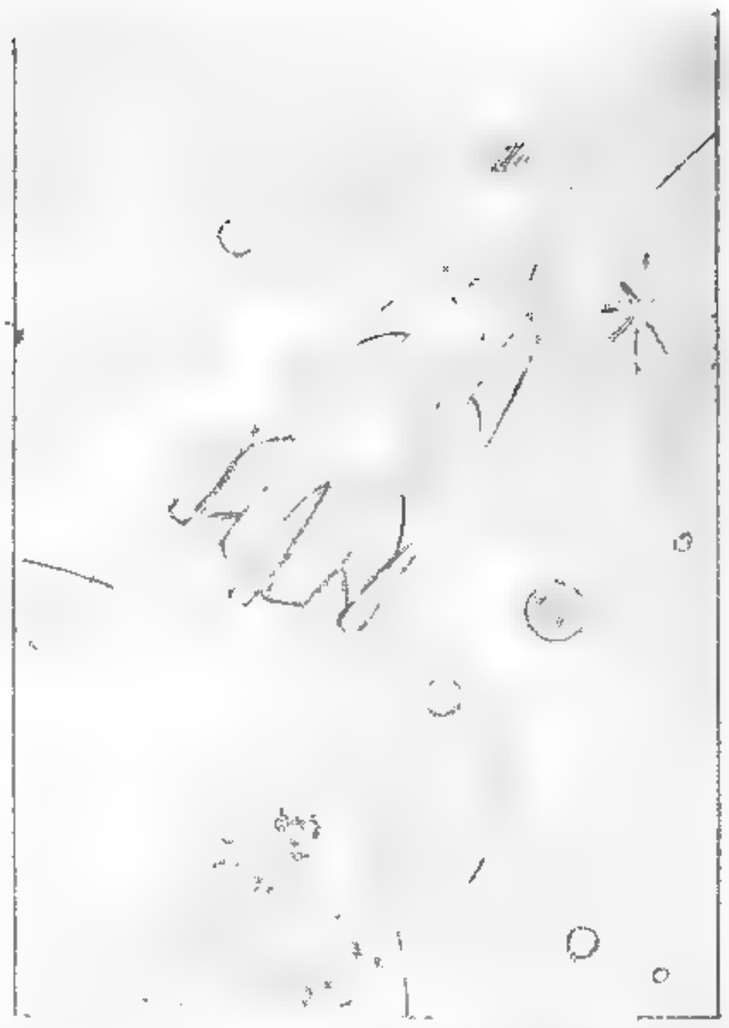
You know I Love SQUA TRONT MAGAZINE. It's the BEST DISGUISED MIMEO-GRAPHED FANZINE I KNOW!

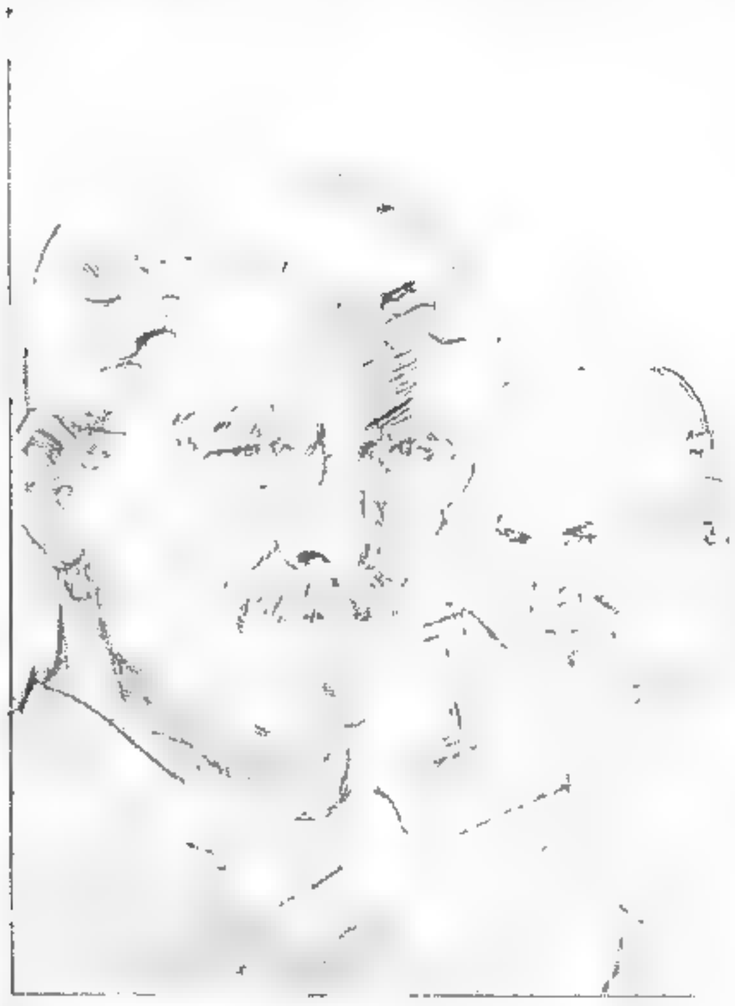
[redacted]

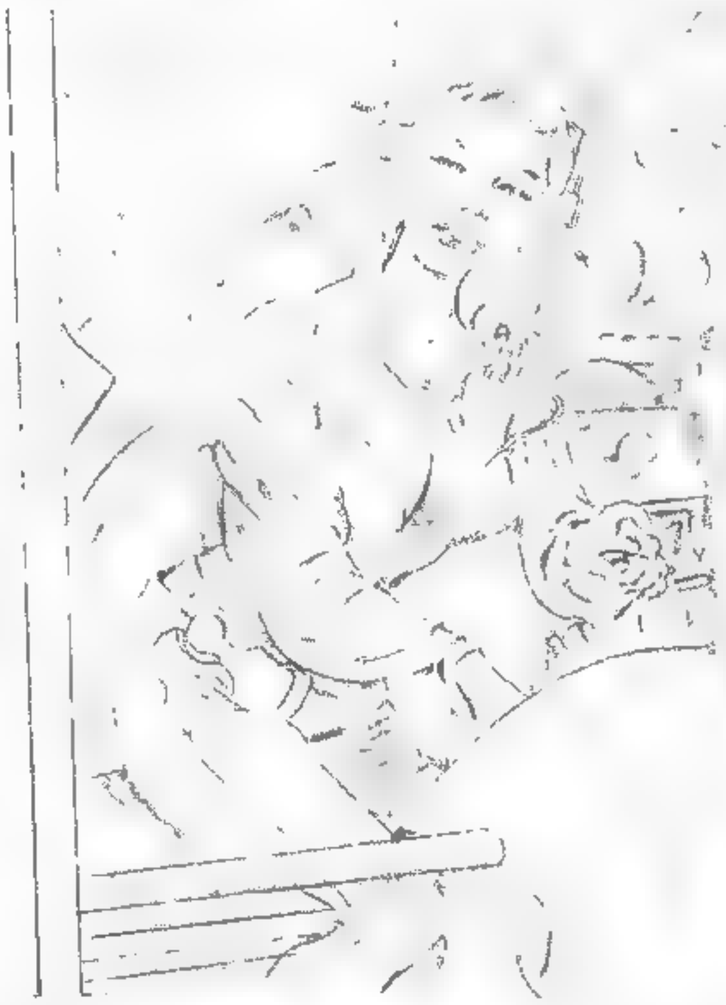
I enjoy reading SQUA TRONT [redacted] more than I do the E.C.'s themselves.

—Love & kisses—
DAVID

On the left, Landon Chesney's homage to Harvey Kurtzman (and Squa Tront*?). On the right, a missive from David Kasakove, co-author of "An Examination of 'Master Race' " in* Squa Tront # 6.







construction of the human figure was similar to Ingels. Hillman was a good company. *Real Clue Crime Stories'* best stories were up to the lower side of *Crime SuspenStories'* average. *Real Clue* created a sleazy, film noir, petty crook milieu quite effectively. If Gerald McCann had signed his work, he'd be famous among fans today. *Real Clue Crime Stories* vol. 6, # 10 is the best *Real Clue* issue I've seen and seems to be their peak, with fine stories and art by Bill Ely; Gerald McCann; another good artist who was a long time Hillman house artist; and—one B. Krigstein. At its best, *Real Clue* was much better than a lot of EC's New Direction.

I know I'm rambling, but I don't have any

ADDITIONS TO THE KRIGSTEIN BIBLIOGRAPHY

Our supposition, in Squa Tront #7, that "Not My Decision to Make" appeared in LOVE DIARY #3 has been confirmed. The following new items have been found:

NYOKA THE JUNGLE GIRL (Fawcett)

#7, May 1947. Nyoka the Jungle Girl in Death in the North Pole Jungle, Part I–Unlucky 13 (8 pgs.); Part II–Axe Murder (5 pgs.); Part III–The Icy Tomb (5 pgs.); Nyoka the Jungle Girl and the Gazelle Boy, Part I–Heads Down to Death (8 pgs.); Part II –Trapped (7 pgs.).

#8, June 1947. Cover; Nyoka the Jungle Girl "The Jungle Ranch of Jee-Raff Jed," Part I–The Black Bullet's Final Warning (8 pgs.); Part II–Winner by a Neck (7 pgs.); Nyoka the Jungle Girl in Jungle Revenge, Part I–Death in the Night (6 pgs.); Part II–Heads Off (6 pgs.); Part III–A Battle Royal (6 pgs.).

[Note: Krigstein believes that he had an assistant for some of the backgrounds in the above issues.]

V. 2 #11, Sept. 1947. Nyoka the Jungle Girl in the Strange Hunt, Part I–Unexplored Jungle (5 2/3 pgs.).

V. 2 #12, Oct. 1947. Nyoka the Jungle Girl and the White Princess with the Black Heart, Part I–The Panther Pit (6 pgs.); Part II–The Black Castle (6 pgs.); Part III–The Kayo Punch" (6 pgs.).

V. 4 #19, May 1948. Nyoka the Jungle Girl and the Elephant Battle (5 pgs.).

V. 4 #20, June 1948. Nyoka the Jungle Girl and the Missing Heads (5 pgs.).

PATCHES (Toytown/Patches)

#9, Aug 47. [Patches "Taxi Mister," inking Mort Leav's pencils] (8 1/3 pgs.); Patches ["Buy Two or Three," inking Mort Leav's pencils] (8 pgs.). [Note: Krigstein believes that these Patches stories are his only work for that title and his only inking for Leav.]

Thanks to Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr. for finding these items.

EC-fan friends who I can rap with about this stuff. And at conventions people mostly just want to take your money. Keep up the excellent work. I'll buy the Severin issue anyway, and I'll enjoy it to the utmost I'm sure.

—Mike Oliveri
Washington, D.C.

More Severin badmouthing! I must take exception to your theorizing of my interest in Severin's work, though. That a particular artist worked for EC certainly isn't by itself impressive to me. In fact, most of my favorite comics artists never worked for EC—Will Eisner, Carl Barks, Walt Kelly, to name the most prominent.

Yes, I'm familiar with Gerald McCann's work, and agree that he's an outstanding artist.

I went over to Libre to check out Bobby Meyers' issue of *Wordworks*, wondering if it was ready for mailing. I was playing my old guitar, which had been left at Dean Fleming's dome—a two studio structure we have used for poetry readings. Izzy Zane, as David Perkins is also known, is a cattle mutilation expert who is State Director for MUFON (Mutual UFO Network). He's got a cover story for *Boulder Magazine*. I loaned him my tattered *WSF* Flying Saucer Report once.

"There's some kind of magazine from New York for you."

"*Squa Tront?*" I asked.

"It's up on the ridge," he replied. "I don't know. It's some kind of magazine."

"Do you know what squa tront means?"

"No," he replied.

"It's one of two alien phrases invented by Al Feldstein for EC. The query is "Spa fon?" The reply is "Squa tront."

"A handy thing to know," said David.

And so, as I walked up to his house which is built around a large rock outfacing in the hillside about 9,000 feet, I rethought, once again, EC. The thing is, EC's a real-life model. It's got business ("How to run a shop," "What is a distributor?"), art ("How did Feldstein's and Kurtzman's word patterns differ?" "Why do I wait with baited breath for *Two-Fisted Tales*, when I should be ecstatic for the science fiction?"). Banal questions. Then a recurrent series of peak experiences that are connected with newsstands 25 years empty of EC's—what a new selection of arrivals meant. Wood's "Gookum," Kurtzman's Korean retreat issue—more timely than the newspapers, closer than TV. I had a cousin in Korea. The kid I read the issues with got killed in Vietnam. Fan-addict was right. EC's were a shot. Nothing like them except Mickey Spillane. The lady at the Addison Shoppe in Rutherford wouldn't let me buy a copy of *Turn of the Screw* because she thought it was by Mickey Spillane.

So I arrived at Izzy's house on the ridge, found *Squa Tront* where he said it would be, pulled out a beer and skimmed it. When I got to the Convention coverage I was glad to see pictures of Bhob and found I remembered what Fred von Bernewitz looked like. And I really like Spiegelman's stuff—so do the friends I've showed *Breakdowns* to.

Then I walked another half-mile up the ridge, past the Star-house, to Bobby Meyers' place. I carried the *Squa Tront* and showed it to him. He was going to print *Wordworks* the next day. He's in hardbound, under "Ginsberg's Choice" in *New Directions* # 37. Two poems he thinks are good. I told him my short oral history of EC. I skipped fandom and fringe-fans and fringe-fringe-fans. I told him *Squa Tront* was edited by John Benson, an old friend who never took drugs.

As Bobby and I sat there, Izzy and Carrie the white witch supersinger and her sister Betsy arrived. We ate shrimp and rice and talked. Izzy said something like, "That picture with the four guys is the most interesting in the book."

"But there are only three guys in the picture."

"Look again."

Sure enough, there were four guys in the picture. I'd looked at it a couple of times and hadn't seen you there at all.

Until the second day of reading *Squa Tront* I didn't run across the Estes Kefauver story. I for one appreciated it. It's the kind of story that could only be told in a fanzine.

It was all over once they were no longer allowed to publish tales that would really affect the shape of nine-year-olds' dreams, feed the shock-vein of the GI, spread like wildfire in the clandestine neighborhoods of small-town America, found a checklist and an audience for the checklist, make people aware that there was an actual, live artist with an individual personality who could or could not, was or was not interested in, drawing certain kinds of story. Let alone that no matter what they said, there *was* a difference between *Mad* and *Panic*. EC taught a kid taste. I think it was the total destruction of a comprehensible business entity by the active intervention of professional bluenoses and meddling mothers. "I will never work under that Code," says Gaines.

"In Memoriam" and black borders. No

Wally Wood took the trouble to photostat this page after he'd pencilled it, before going ahead with the inking, providing us with a rare (perhaps a unique) opportunity to see an EC page in its pencil stage. It's the second page of "Dark Side of the Moon," from Weird Fantasy *# 15 (# 3), Sep.-Oct. 1950. Comparison to the completed version reveals that Wally added his own lettering, and some additional clutter to panel 4, and made other minor changes.*

more EC's. It was 6:00 on a winter night in Lyndhurst, N.J., on Ridge Road in a newsstand across from the Public Service Bus Stop. The fresh, new copies were on the rack. With no sense of apprehension I picked up the last of the horror mags. Never again that thrill, that shot. Maybe it was a shot of wonderful America, where Freedom of the Press allowed you to read some guy's idea of entertainment. At any rate, the game changed. All of a sudden it was, "What can these guys get through the censors?" not, "What will they do to shock us next?"

No more mazes of razor blades. Maybe some late glimmers of the Great Age: "Master Race," Mark Stone, that Williamson sea piece as spacious as Houston's *Moby Dick*. John Craig's bra-rape reporter stuff. But no more stories like "Luke" or "Lufbery" even though there was *Aces High*. And then PictoFiction and then Kurtzman leaves *Mad*. Nothing but footnotes until '70. "There's a Davis ad." "A Severin cover." "A Williamson western." "Wood and Crandall are doing a thing called *Noman*." "Frazetta drew Annie Fannie this month. She's got real tits."

Footnotes.

I prefer EC Academia. It's still not quite respectable, but you don't need credentials and poor scholarship is corrected and condemned, as it was in the letters pages. Who really cares if over attention to historical detail fucked up the flow of Kurtzman's impassioned antiwar diatribes?

I fell asleep on the Newark Academy school bus one time, unseen by the driver whose name was Randy, was dropped off deep in the heart of Paterson. I called my mother and described where I was lost, then turned from the phone to the comic rack. There was the *Mad* composition book cover. Oh, I am full of EC stories. None of them fitten for publication because they are so intensely personal. I think everybody who bought them on the stands felt the shock and impact.

Squa Tront is great. Nothing better or more rewarding than footnotes to ephemera. Instant nostalgia.

And so I take up my chainsaw and axe and work off my remaining energy on pinon and cottonwood.

—Clark Dimond
Gardner, Co.

Recently I had the pleasure of experiencing what was perhaps the closest I'll ever come to entering a time portal to the past, when I received (after some delay) Russ Cochran's complete *Weird Science*, the first of the proposed reprints of the full EC line. Even though the stories are printed in black and white without Marie Severin's beautiful somber colors, this is OK because I'm an artist myself and I get to see the intricate line-work and style development of the very artists who were my inspirations. Especially enjoyable was the delicate line and heroic figures of Williamson and Frazetta, and the moody shadows of Wood—there seems to be more going on in those Wood panels than contained in an entire page of any of today's comics!

My first experience with EC was when I was about six years old and just learning to read. In fact, it was those fantastic panels depicting gorgeous, scantily clad women in bizarre alien settings, along with BEM's, rocket men and UFO's, which fanned my curiosity and desire to understand those wordy balloons accompanying the drawings. You could follow a *Superman* or *Captain Marvel* comic panel by panel and need little dialogue to know what's happening—bad guy threatens, good guy beats him up. But those EC's!! There were a lot of wide-eyed, surprised-looking people running around through equally strange settings. I *had* to know *what* was going on.

WALDEN, THE U.S. ROCKET JUNDATION... THE JR OF THE ILL-FATED MBIA"! HOW WELL ER THAT COLD MORNING LAMOS TESTING GROUND... / SCATTERED VEHICLES ED BY THE GIANT ROCKET...

"...AND THE FACES... THEY WILL ALWAYS BE WITH ME! *JOSEPH KRAMER*, AMERICA'S FOREMOST ASTRO-NAVIGATOR..."

THIRTY SECONDS! SAFETY BELTS SECURE!

"...*ADAM BLACK* ROCKET ENGINEER, AND EX-NAVY TEST PILOT..."

TWENTY SECOND! KISS OL' MOTHER EARTH GOOD-BYE!

"...AND THE OTHERS... *MIKE PARENDEAU*, METEOROLOGIST... *HARVEY TOVAR*, RESEARCH ASTROPHYSICIST... AND *WILL LEYDEN*, ROCKET EXPERT..."

THIS IS IT, WILL! TEN SECONDS!

CORRECTION! FIVE SECONDS!

"THEN THE SHOCK... A GREAT, SILENT JOLT THAT DEAFENED US WITHOUT SOUND... FOR IN A SPLIT SECOND, WE WERE MOVING TOO FAST FOR SOUND WAVES TO CATCH US! I'M AFRAID MY NOSE BLED QUITE PROFUSELY."

"BY THE TIME WE HAD OUR WITS ABOUT US, THE EARTH WAS MERELY A REFLECTED HEMISPHERE THAT WE STUDIED THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC PERISCOPE..."

"IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED... DAYS RECORDED ONLY BY THE CHRONOMETER, FOR THERE WAS NO LIGHT NOR DARKNESS... WE GREW ACCUSTOMED TO THE SHIP..."

I STILL CAN'T GET USED TO ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY, WILL! I KNOW IT'S CENTRIFUGAL FORCE, BUT...

OF COURSE! YOU REALIZE WE'RE IN A CAPSULE WITHIN THE SHIP WHICH IS ROTATING AT GREAT SPEED SO WE MAY STAND IN NORMAL POSTURE, BUT IT IS OUR DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS THAT DISTURBS YOU, EH?

WALDEN! MIKE! COME HERE! IT IS SO CLOSE I COULD REACH OUT AND TOUCH IT!

OH, WHAT A SIGHT! I WISH WE COULD KNOCK A PORT-HOLE IN THIS TUB SO WE COULD SEE THE REAL THING!

Illustration copyright © 1983 William M. Gaines.

It was 1953, and I lived in Ridgewood, Queens, N.Y. in a second story apartment four houses up the block from my grandmother's house where I spent much of my time sitting on the porch or in the back yard reading comics. I was a comic book addict even before my first EC.

At this time my mother's younger brother still lived with my grandmother and it was he that introduced me to EC. He was in his late teens and used to come home with a stack of comics which I noticed had much more interesting covers than the ones my mother brought home for me. I found out later that my mother would read them herself, but thought they were a little too much for her six-year-old. Anyway, I also noticed that after my glimpsing the comic covers, my uncle would hide them from me, tucking them in the oddest places around the house.

Once, while reading my own mildly exciting *Captain Marvel*'s under one of those huge old piano-legged dining room tables, I discovered his main hiding place. Looking up, I saw them wedged in a shelf which lined the underside edge of the table's massive top. The forbidden fruit was eaten and I was forever ~~hooked~~ damned. After a while it became a game. My uncle would hide the latest issues 'till he could read them, while I would hunt to get at them first!

These old memories rocketed back while reading the complete *Weird Science*. Only another EC fan-addict could understand the tickling sensation, the sense of timelessness, when I rediscovered a story which blew my mind a quarter of a century earlier and which has haunted me ever since. I'm talking about Wood's "The Loathsome" in *WS* # 20, where the skull-faced mutant girl falls from the tree into a picket fence, dropping a note that declared "Whoever finds this note, I love you"! Its powerful effect on me was only reinforced rereading it 25 years later. Another story whose imagery on occasion would pop up from my memory was "The People's Choice" in *WS* # 16—those people with the "alligator" parasites taking over their arms in the last panel! When I first received the complete *Weird Science* it was noon. I spent the rest of the day reading them and didn't finish 'till four in the morning!

Some negative memories also accompanied the reading of those weird and fantasy filled comics. I remember the vague feeling that I was doing something forbidden and evil reading them. I was brought up in a strict Catholic community where censorship was the "cure all" for any social problem, and the pressure was *on* to ban those horrid books!

One day my father came home and I asked him to explain a particular last panel to a, I think, *Tales from the Crypt* story where a girl was surrounded by a bunch of vampires or werewolves, and I think it was too much for him. At first he tried patiently to explain what was going on in that phony way parents have when a kid asks a question the parent feels uncomfortable giving a truthful answer to. What was going to *happen* was all I wanted to know! But he gave me some mickey mouse garbage which I *knew* could not be what was described in that caption. When I refused to accept his interpretation and insisted he come across with the truth, it was too much for him. He exploded, ripped up the comic, and scolded my mother for bringing comics into the house. Guess he believed they were a subversive Commie plot to get children to rebel against parental authority (or to *think*?). Anyway, for about four weeks, comics were taboo for me. Eventually he relented when my mother told him I would be reading only *Captain Marvel*'s and funny animal comics. Of course, I just read my EC's on the sly, hiding them 'till the heat was off. In those days, EC's were bootleg stuff, worse than today's undergrounds.

But that's the past, and I can honestly say that my experience with EC comics was one of the most *educational* experiences of my life. I further believe that the real reason the "powers that were" allowed that quack Wertham the spotlight was because of the many "social realism" stories done in the crime comics more than anything else. The censors learn early that the best way to attack someone who raises issues is to divert attention away from the issues to the sexual or moral beliefs of the one raising the issues.

—Chris Pepo
Staten Island, N.Y.

Educational!

Back about '58, at the age of about eleven, a box or so of fairly minty EC's was given me by a family friend. I loved 'em, absolutely o'd'ed on 'em. But by 1961, they were lost to the years, you know, swiped by nieces and nephews, borrowed by buddies and never returned, given away as prizes at Halloween parties, etc. I had over 200 EC's and by 1961 every last one was gone. I didn't even have one left! Down through the 1960's I never ran across another EC! Never. I wondered what ever became of them, I searched in used book stores, everywhere, but to no avail. As the years went by, I even began to forget the names of the titles, the letters EC, etc. But I couldn't forget the grinning mugs of the GhouLunatics, and that, so to speak, was my one thin thread to the memory of the rich legend of EC. What a delight it was to discover Barlow and Hershenson's EC reprints along about 1973, and then, through them, *Squa Tront*!

Come on, John, we need another issue of *Squa Tront*! I need a fix bad! Just because Russ Cochran is doing the EC Library now, we can still succumb to the decadent luxury and opulence of the crisp aroma of a new issue of *Squa Tront*, can't we?

—Don Edwards
Montebello, Ca.

I discovered *Squa Tront* in the Supersnipe Comic Book Euphorium yesterday, and I was doubly surprised to see my name in the issue, regarding the article I wrote so long ago on my visits to the former EC offices on Lafayette Street ["The EC Fanzines: Part 1," *Squa Tront* # 5 and "Part 3," # 8]. I don't recall that phone call Bhob Stewart made to me, but evidently I owe him an overdue apology if I ever implied that I had no time to speak to a fellow EC fan!

I became hooked when, as a teenager, I picked up the first edition of *Weird Science*. Incredibly enough, I remember the instance to this day, 30 years later! I saved and subscribed, and made a number of very exciting trips down to the EC offices, getting to know Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein. My "famous" article on the EC offices was prompted by these irregular but wonderful visits, the first one of which was made to see if I could buy the first issue of *Shock SuspenStories* after it'd been introduced and then been not available wherever I looked for it. I did get the issue, and since I was with my father at the time, and I didn't want to get a single crease or fold in it, I put it in his briefcase. Later in the afternoon the briefcase was lost in the taxi we'd taken uptown, which almost caused a family panic, but we did retrieve it the next day, so all was well. I had so much fun on that visit that I afterward returned from time to time to keep in touch. As my interest grew higher and higher (if it were possible to do so), I asked my parents if we could have Bill and Al up for cocktails at our apartment—corner of 66th Street and Park Avenue—which we did. I guess the "wealthy" implication came from the fact that we did have a very nice apartment then, and Bill was particularly interested in the stereo system that had just been installed throughout.

Also, it's not true that I "threw away all my EC's when I got married." My wife, unfortunately, does not share my interest in EC comics—and is quite against them, really, to this day, and we've been married over 20 years. She still doesn't understand this. She was very much against my EC collection, and so to appease her (and make my parents less concerned, as they really didn't like them either!) I destroyed—not threw out—my precious and, today, very valuable collection, with the exception of a very few mementos—including the EC cufflinks that Bill Gaines gave me one day as a symbol of lasting friendship, a few 3-D issues and *The EC Fan Bulletin* # 1. When I read that there were EC fans starting a new generation, I passed these articles on to Rich Hauser with a long letter. I was glad to do this. And then, not long afterward, things started rising to the surface, with new fans coming on the horizon, Bruce Hershenson and Ron Barlow's East Coast Comix, and then Russ Cochran's hardcovers. I see a new wave starting all over again. I really couldn't be happier—and this time, as I gradually amass my collection once again thanks to Cochran, etc., they are *staying*. When I received the first reprint volumes it was like being plugged in and lit up after 20 years of semi-darkness and only fond, long-ago memories. I feel resurrected now.

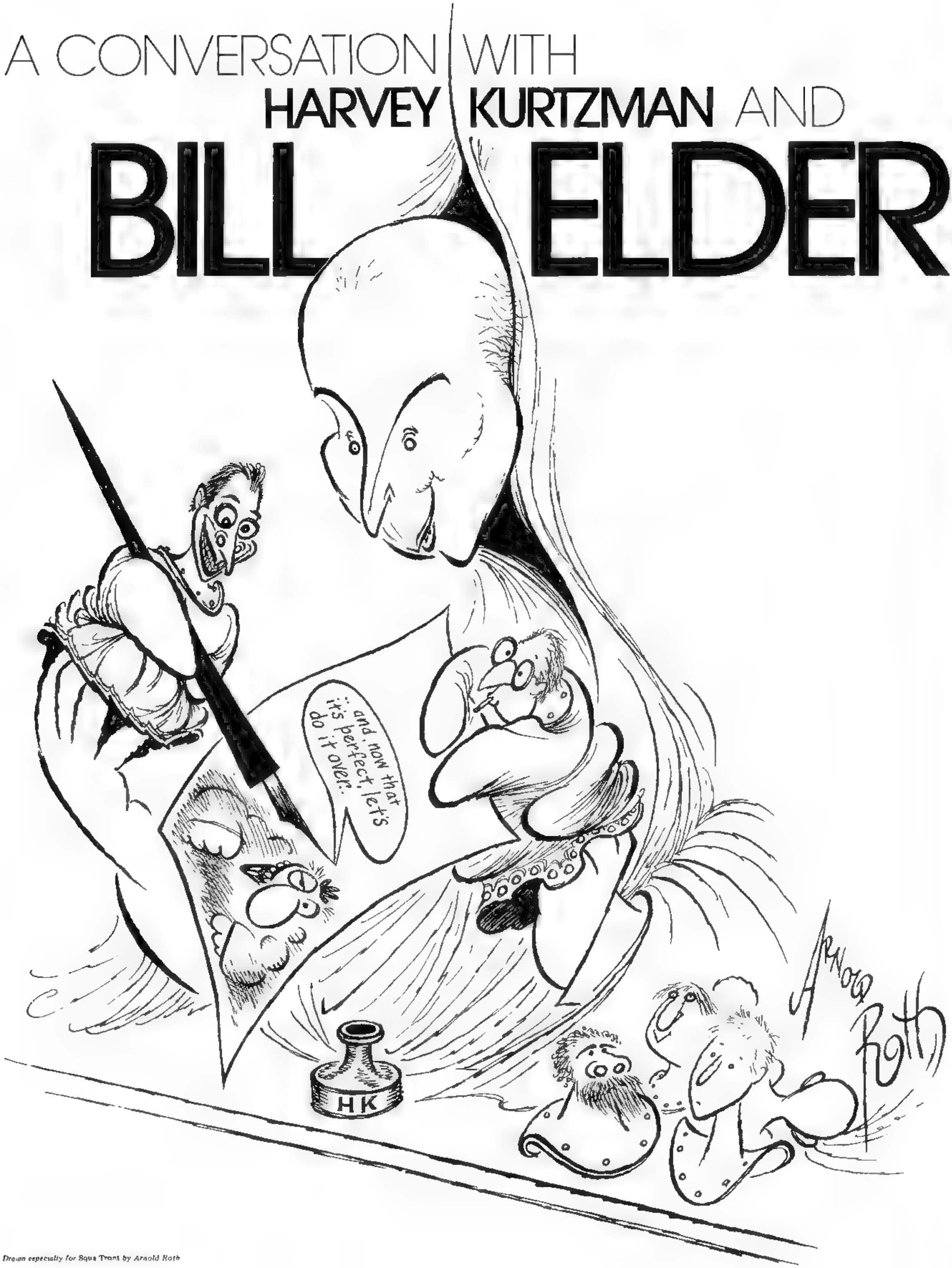
—George Snowden, III
Greenwich, Ct.

In addition to the letters excerpted above, comments were also received from: James Cassara, Larry Lankford, Robert Parsons, Dave Peacock, Flo Steinberg, Randall Trass, Tom Watkins and Fredric Wertham. All letters are read and appreciated! Send yours to: John Benson, 205 W. 80th Street, # 2E, New York, N.Y. 10024.

Like other artists, Johnny Craig sometimes worked out pictorial ideas on the back of the original art. The examples on the opposite page are interesting because he drew the characters in poses not found in the story and then inked them in. The standing figure was drawn on the back of page three of "Impending Doom" (TftC # 20); the other two studies are for "Zombie" (CoT # 19).

George Snowden, III with Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein, during their visit to his apartment in 1955. Says Snowden, "Since this was taken, I've long since given up bow-ties and lost most of my hair. Bill has changed a bit, too!"

A CONVERSATION WITH HARVEY KURTZMAN AND BILL ELDER



Drawn especially for Squa Tront *by Arnold Roth*

KURTZMAN: Are you ready to order?
ELDER: I'll have a cheeseburger while he's thinking it over.
WAITRESS: *How do you want it?*
ELDER: Make it medium-rare, please.
KURTZMAN: I'm going to have an egg over light, with . . .
WAITRESS: *One egg?*
KURTZMAN: Yeah. Some bacon and a glass of orange juice.
BENSON: *I'll have two eggs over light . . .*
ELDER: Is that what this interview is going to be all about? Two eggs over light, and a cuppa coffee, hamburger?
BENSON: . . . *with bacon and orange juice.*
WAITRESS: *Are you having coffee with that?*
ELDER: I will afterwards, please. I like it hot. How do we begin?
BENSON: *The first time we met, I said that I had always thought of your work as being similar to Hogarth . . .*
ELDER: The English artist? Yes, well, he is a satirist in a sense. Also, a kind of a reporter, making a commentary on the times. I don't have the servants that he had, though. I'm afraid my income is a lot smaller.
BENSON: *Your response then was that you thought your work was more like Brueghel than Hogarth.*
ELDER: Brueghel, yes. Hogarth was rather more sophisticated as far as his art was concerned than Brueghel. I always felt Brueghel's work was symbolic—of the human nature of man, the greed, the evil, the lust, the corruption.
BENSON: *I'm really interested to hear that you're painting.*
ELDER: You mean the things I do other than the things I do for a living? The things I do for an *un*living.
KURTZMAN: Will's got a whole bunch of marvelous paintings at home.
ELDER: I paint, in a sense, in the old French Impressionist school, the school I sort of favor personally. I don't have any reason why I favor these particular painters, but it's something that perhaps I've been influenced by in my earlier years. And I find that there's a kind of freedom it affords me when I paint that way. I paint tight in most of my cartooning, and this is a way to break away, break loose. So I do a lot of paintings at home; portraits, landscapes. Sunday paintings. Typical Sunday painter. Once in a while on Monday, if I'm waiting for Hefner's approval on one of Harvey's stories. If I have a month off I'll have a lot of painting to look forward to. That's happened over the last few years.
BENSON: *You did some wonderful paintings for* Trump *. . . the Breck shampoo parody with Hairless Joe, for instance.*
ELDER: Oh, that Hairless Joe was Russ Heath.
BENSON: *But you did that great cover for* Sporty Illustrations.
KURTZMAN: Yeah, Will did some outstanding paintings. *Sporty Illustrations,* the *Life* magazine parody . . .
ELDER: "The Epic of Man," which was a tremendous undertaking. And a labor of love because it paid nothing. But it was fun. I think we all worked for fun.
KURTZMAN: And then, of course, that outstanding painting, that Norman Rockwell take-off [*intended for* Trump *# 3, printed in* Playboy, *Dec. 1957*]. Incredible!
ELDER: I was always a Rockwell fan. You know, our doctor is one of the very rare doctors who still makes house calls. And one of our kids was sick, and he came to the house. Very stoic, very emotionless. He believes in the old remedies of "put 'em to bed, plenty of rest, juice, and that's all." No vaporizers, no pills, nothing. This man I never saw smile before. He looked at that "Rockwell" painting that's on the wall in our foyer. He thought it was a reproduction at first. He glared at it for five minutes. Suddenly he exploded and hit the floor, like a bag of cement. And he roared. I never saw a man break up like that. It gave away his character immediately. I knew he loved macabre humor. You know he didn't fall for this sweet sugary stuff. Anyway, I felt the painting was successful if my doctor could laugh at it.
BENSON: *Did you have any trouble switching over from line illustration?*
ELDER: Not really. I keep telling people who ask me this very same question that I'm essentially an artist . . . a cartoon artist. I incorporate everything. I try to. I look at the field as the whole field of art.
KURTZMAN: Will was painting as far back as I can remember. Right when he got out of school he used to be fascinated by painting. So it wasn't as if he'd switched; he'd been painting all the time.
ELDER: I feel that art is a challenge, if it's line, watercolor, oil, any phase of it. Satire, which is really the basis of my art, the thing that I live for . . . my—what's the word—metier?
KURTZMAN: *Raison d'etre.*
ELDER: *Raison d'etre,* that's the word I'm thinking of. The good old French, they have a name for everything. Actually, cartooning's a phase of my art. What I'm doing now is another phase of my art, a phase I love very much because it incorporates a lot of the techniques I've used in the past. Plus the humor of it, mostly Harvey's. It gives me an outlet for whatever talents I have in that area.
KURTZMAN: I like the way Willie uses Harvey's humor. Every time I give a story to Will, he moves everything an inch to the left.
ELDER: This sure is slow ketchup, like they advertise. It's frozen, that's why!
BENSON: *When did you first meet?*
ELDER: Oh, this goes way back.
KURTZMAN: High school.
ELDER: High school days, surely. I barely knew Harv at the time. I was so obsessed with myself and my own class. I was a real cut-up. I loved to have fun; I loved to upset everybody's apple cart.
KURTZMAN: Willie was a big-man-on-campus of sorts.
ELDER: No, no, not quite. I wasn't a big man . . .
KURTZMAN: I said, "of sorts."
ELDER: "Of sorts." Sort-of-ness.
KURTZMAN: At the High School of Music and Art, Will was a star.
ELDER: I was the Manson of the zanies. The Charles Manson of the nuts. I was a frenetic humorist.
KURTZMAN: I was not. I was a watcher of stars.
ELDER: You were a thinker.
KURTZMAN: I used to watch these guys from afar.
ELDER: Harvey would absorb everything that was going on. And he's using that today, you know.
KURTZMAN: I remember seeing Will originally, in the lunchroom; he used to have a routine with Al Jaffee. He was Costello to Jaffe's Abbott.
ELDER: It would be more like Laurel to Jaffee's Hardy.
KURTZMAN: No, I think Abbott and Costello was fair, because you were the funny one.
ELDER: I was the boisterous one. So I guess Costello would be a better parallel, yeah.
KURTZMAN: Will was very physical back then. He isn't any more. You wouldn't know that he's got a sense of humor to look at him because he's a very quiet man. But back then he was a comedian, he was like a stand-up . . . not even a stand-up comic. He was the Chaplin of that particular class. Will has abilities that very few people know of. Those of us at Music and Art remember. He had a combination of Danny Kaye and . . .
ELDER: Early Hollywood influence, the Marx Brothers . . .
KURTZMAN: Sid Caesar. Willy *moved* very well. He was kind of a natural dancer, and he'd do all these physical things. One minute he'd be a ventriloquist's dummy. The next minute he'd be a fighter pilot in a telephone booth, with ketchup dribbling out of his mouth.
ELDER: How do you remember those routines? I was a great practical joker. I just loved that. I always wanted to shock people. I always shocked my parents and my relatives. I got sort of a macabre gleefulness out of seeing them suffer, for some reason or other. I was a deflater of authority, like the Marx Brothers. I loved them.
KURTZMAN: If you only knew the times that I've told Willie stories.
ELDER: You know, when Harvey goes around telling people about my practical jokes, people think it's wildly funny. But while it was happening I got a lot of nasty looks. People were really injured by it. And I never found anything amusing in it after it was done. I got booted on the ear every time I did something like that. But when the story's related to strange ears, to people who are safe from the scene of the accident, time and distance, the thing's *hilarious.* They happen to be true, but when Harvey relates them, usually in the wordage, the explanation of what happened, there's kind of a mystic aura that's added to it. Because it's not seen, it's part of

the fantasy. It's only in words, you have to draw your own pictures. And when people draw their own pictures they're usually larger than life.

KURTZMAN: All these Willie stories, all these creative things that he used to invent, little routines and tricks and illusions. In high school that was Willie's system for gaining popularity. I think I can say that.

ELDER: Yes, absolutely. I needed that very much.

BENSON: *Did you stop doing that about the time* Mad *started?*

ELDER: No, I . . . The thing is that there was an area where I could sublimate all this energy I used in the past, all this frenetic zaniness into another form, a form that would finally make a living for me.

KURTZMAN: After high school, all that was gone. He didn't need it any more.

ELDER: It was a way of making up for a lot. I wasn't what they consider a good student. I wasn't a top-notch student, average, or even below average, because I really didn't care. My interest didn't lie there. I wasn't getting anywhere through my grades, wasn't becoming popular as a bright student. But I noticed people looking at me. I could see myself becoming popular as a nut. The dividends were greater. Not only did I better my humor by actually experiencing it and doing things, and getting the feeling of freedom of expression, but I gained friends. It was a very encouraging thing for me. One thing led to another; the encouragement just made me increase my output.

KURTZMAN: It's fascinating that what Willie was doing was the classic thing that all comics do. And Willie and I have talked a lot and I think I know his mind very well.

ELDER: Sick!

KURTZMAN: The comedian, the clown—both nouns are interchangeable with me—is essentially a self-deprecating image. You get pleasure from the clown at his expense. And Will was always aware of that.

ELDER: Right. Very much so.

KURTZMAN: Which is why he turned against the clown image very quickly as soon as he got out of school. That's my own opinion.

ELDER: Well, it was a way of launching myself, in a sense. Once I was . . .

KURTZMAN: You know, that classic self-deprecation of giving the crowd a kick at your own expense is something that Willie understood very early in life. I've known comedians, successful comedians, and some of them never, never lose that madness of kicking themselves to the very end, for the pleasure of the mob, and they're that way all through life. They never stop beating themselves up.

ELDER: I learned very early, maybe through instinct, that people will laugh at you if they aren't involved. In other words, they're watching someone else doing the suffering for them, vicariously. It was safer for me. And I knew my limitations, I knew how much I could take—physically and mentally. I could control a certain amount of it. The fact is that it kept people safe from any harm or embarrassment. I kind of absorbed that for them.

KURTZMAN: That's part of what humor's about.

ELDER: Right. But it was very safe for me to continue in that role. Not at anybody else's expense, but my own. This was the cheapest I could afford, you see.

BENSON: *So from going to school together, you shared a studio?*

ELDER: That's correct. I ran into Harvey . . . there was a nasty accident. We met through a mutual friend, more or less.

KURTZMAN: We were all in the army, World War II. We were all of that age. And after the war our condition was very similar—out of the army looking for jobs. And I think I ran into Will through . . .

ELDER: Harry Jaffee.

KURTZMAN: Yes. Also from Music and Art and brother of Al Jaffee.

ELDER: Very talented artist.

KURTZMAN: At the time I had a studio with Irving Geis, remember? You don't know who Irving Geis is, do you John?

BENSON: *He was the art director for* Trump.

ELDER: And he also worked for *The Scientific American* for many years.

KURTZMAN: Well, Irv had a fancy joint on 57th Street and Eighth Avenue, where I was renting space. And I remember you came up with Harry and we had lunch or something. Afterwards, we renewed our very tenuous . . .

ELDER: That's right. Very good. I'd forgotten that meeting. We spoke of other mutual friends, like Charlie Stern and Harold Van Riel.

KURTZMAN: Music and Art. The connection was all Music and Art. Then, a few years later, when I decided to leave Irving Geis's studio—actually I was kicked out of Irving Geis's studio—I wanted to start a studio of my own.

ELDER: So that's why you were so anxious to join us. I got kicked out of my home. That's about the same thing, isn't it?

KURTZMAN: So I got together with the Music and Arters, Willie Elder and Charlie Stern. [*Note: Stern died since this interview took place.*] Actually, I remember I went through quite a few studios. I had a studio with Fred Ottenheimer, my original studio, I got a rented room in Greenwich Village, which was an awful . . . And then from there I got this loft with Will and Charlie. We had a collective studio.

ELDER: The Charles William Harvey Studio, on 28th Street somewhere.

KURTZMAN: It was kind of a nutty time of our lives, which I remember with a certain amount of fondness and apprehension.

BENSON: *Was that after you worked for Lou Ferstadt?*

KURTZMAN: I worked with Ferstadt before the war. When I got back Lou Ferstadt was out of the picture.

BENSON: *When you shared the studio, were you actually working on any projects together?*

ELDER: We did. I had some contacts of my own. Very little, of course.

KURTZMAN: I got one of the classic lessons of business in working with Willie and Charlie. We never thought too much about the business of business, and three more unlikely businessmen you never saw in your life.

ELDER: It was the classic story.

KURTZMAN: To me it was the lesson of lessons. We decided to have this art studio. And we spent the first month of our career doing up the sample book. Charlie was very good at that.

ELDER: Never took a penny for it.

KURTZMAN: This giant photo album. We made stationery and everything. We decided to call ourselves the Charles William Harvey Studio.

ELDER: Getting our names in order was really about a

"WILLIE STORIES"

From time to time Harvey Kurtzman has told various Elder anecdotes. Here are a few: "Will's a very quiet person now, but he used to be an absolute lunatic in the old days. We'd go to a restaurant, and when Will went to pay the cashier, he'd open his wallet and pull out lettuce—real *lettuce. When we worked downtown in our collective studio on Broadway, very often we'd go down for lunch and Willie would cross the street through the thick of halted traffic waiting for the light to change, and instead of going around the four-doors, he'd go right through them—in the door on one side, "Excuse me," and out the other side.*

"When he was a kid, he'd picked up some old clothes ready to be thrown out, and he decided to get rid of them in style. So he snitched a bottle of his mother's ketchup from the pantry, and out in the street he fixed himself up to look like he'd been through an automobile accident—torn clothes sprinkled with ketchup. Then he crawled back, scratching on the front door. When his mother opened the door she found Willie gasping "The eushilists are coming!" I don't remember the story behind the word "eushilists." Anyway, the family and visiting relatives went into total panic—"What do you mean, 'The eushilists are coming'?" They literally called an ambulance for Willie. And at a certain point he ran out of the house and ran away. And of course eventually he came home and got the kishkes kicked out of him."

HEY, FELLAS... LET ME IN... IT'S YOUR OLE PAL LESTER
GOODBYE OLD FRIEND!
HEE UP... BEEP BEEP... PIGACKUS FALLAMANDARO BOOOP MICKEY TOOMUS
SAY, CHARLIE, RASP URP! I GOTTA SHOOT RIGHT DOWN TO VANTINES CAFF CAFF WITH THIS...
LOOK— I'M BUSY I WORKED ALL NIGHT... COME BACK IN HALF AN HOUR
SLANTE GAEL!
HEY, FELLAS CAN I COME OUT NOW... CECILE'S EXPECTING ME!
PEPSI COLA HITS THE SPOT.. TWELVE FULL OUNCES.. ETC.
YES, PEPSI-COLA HITS THE SPOT.... GET IT AT YOUR NEAREST GROCER

A 'NORMAL' DAY AT THE CHAS·WM·HARVEY STUDIO !!!

This was drawn by John Severin during the Charles William Harvey Studio's heyday. Clockwise from the left, the players are Frank Dorsey (under the drawing board), Lester Persky, Harvey Kurtzman ("in my Sigmund Freud days"), Will Elder, a customer from the Vantines account, Charlie Stern, John Severin ("Slante Gael") and Robert Q. Sale. Kurtzman explains Sale's strange bit of dialogue: "Sale used to stutter, but he could sing commercials without stuttering, so he would accompany the commercials constantly." Will Elder's strange bit of dialogue is explained by the fact that the speaker is Will Elder. The original of this drawing is displayed prominently in Kurtzman's living room. He says, "I'm very fond of it—it's John Severin at his line-drawing, pen-drawing best. No brush. Look at how the line drawing complements the little table full of instruments, the lampshade that has a bullet hole dent in it. I'm happy that it's being reproduced; that sort of guarantees it long life."

month's work.

KURTZMAN: And after all was said and done with our sample book and our plans to pull in all kinds of work, we got our first major job through a relative of Willie, a distant relative. After all this lightning and thunder of studio and sample book and letterheads, how do we get work? Through relatives! It was a come-down. But nevertheless, it was our first big score, thanks to Will.

ELDER: I'm sorry to this day that it worked out that way. It was like vultures picking at a dead corpse.

KURTZMAN: We had a publicity brochure to turn out, a movie pressbook.

ELDER: For Paramount Pictures. Ernie Tubbs. Remember the old cowboy star, the singing star? It was a grade Z movie . . .

KURTZMAN: So the three of us sat there and looked at each other and said, "OK, now, who does what?" Our organization didn't have any structure. It was the three musketeers. So we said . . .

ELDER: I swept the floor immediately. I played it safe.

KURTZMAN: See, the brochure consisted of a cover and the ads inside. And there were things that were obviously more fun to do than other things. The cover was the plum. So we sat around and said, "OK, now who's going to do the cover?" And each of us came to the brilliant decision that he would do the cover. So we were at an impasse. So we came to the second brilliant decision. We will make decisions by a vote. So we cast three votes toward doing the cover, and how do you think the voting came out. Exactly the same way.

ELDER: The democratic system! Three politicians in a phone booth.

KURTZMAN: I don't know exactly how that brochure got done, but we . . .

ELDER: Did we put out three covers? We put out your brochure, Charlie's brochure and my brochure.

KURTZMAN: I think we did. I think we each made samples. But we disintegrated very rapidly after that.

ELDER: I think we lost the account, didn't we?

KURTZMAN: Well, they printed it. I don't think we ever really *got* the account.

ELDER: It was a charity thing. He paid us practically nothing.

KURTZMAN: So the big lesson was that there's no such thing as a structureless organization without a pyramid. You have to have a boss.

ELDER: We would have parties up there at the studio; it was a place to go at night. After all, we were paying the rent, and it was only used half a day. And we would invite this waitress up from the cafe around the corner, remember? And you'd take pictures of us; this was all legit, of course. This cute little girl we used as a model. We said, "We'll put you in a little brochure for Paramount Pictures." My god, she thought she was going someplace. Ernie Tubb! They know Ernie Tubb!

KURTZMAN: You remember that girl!

ELDER: Sure! "You know Ernie Tubb? You're working for Paramount?" She looked at our little loft. My god. The tumbleweeds were rolling around the room. You know, it was kind of a crammed place. Then occasionally we'd go out on this little flat roof that adjoined it. We played basketball out there.

KURTZMAN: The loft had a skylight, one of those big, slanting skylights. I think that's what made it for us. We said, "Hey, a skylight, man, this is it, an artist's studio!"

ELDER: Didn't we advertise by making little paper airplanes with our name on it and floating them out into the street?

KURTZMAN: We had a lot of fun. We used to carry on. All of our friends used to come up to the studio. It was a hangout.

ELDER: We worked very hard at looking busy. It was kind of a watering hole, an oasis for vagabonds like ourselves. Fellows who didn't have the nerve to open up a studio.

KURTZMAN: We had a row of drawing boards. And a big couch-bed. And a gigantic glop of handmade furniture. You remember Tony the carpenter?

ELDER: May his soul rest in peace. I think he was executed the other day.

KURTZMAN: This old bed. The studio was a giant bed, and a couple of little things all around it.

ELDER: That was sort of a launching pad for, at least, Harvey and myself. Charlie . . .

KURTZMAN: Charlie used the bed. He was the cocksman amongst us. And he took full advantage of that fact.

ELDER: Good old horizontal Charlie. Then we decided to move out of there after we had a fire. These chemical plants were in the building. I think something burst and ran downstairs like a . . .

KURTZMAN: Willie was constantly horsing around with his routines. You mentioned a fire. The place was a firetrap. I'll never forget one day Willie decided to demonstrate a little trick where . . .

ELDER: That was in the other studio, Harv. Our second studio, the one on Broadway.

KURTZMAN: No, I don't think so. Well, in any case, Will appears one day, and his finger is blazing. A gigantic torch of fire. Because what he's done is put his finger in rubber cement . . .

ELDER: I think I told you I just stuck my finger in the socket: "Look what happened!"

KURTZMAN: . . . and it didn't work out the way Willie thought it would, and he started shaking it, trying to put it out, frantically, and he sent globs of flaming rubber cement all over the studio . . .

ELDER: Meteors is what they were.

KURTZMAN: You see three guys jumping around like maniacs trying to put the fire out. But I could have sworn it was the old studio . . .

ELDER: The one above the restaurant, on Broadway. Irving Geis used the little adjoining room, the foyer.

KURTZMAN: We got kicked out of the first studio.

ELDER: Anyway, from there we met a lot of people in the comic book business. At least, Harvey had a few accounts in the comic business. And I had a few advertising accounts with some very strange characters.

KURTZMAN: We opened up the second studio, and people came through . . . Dave Berg rented space. Lester Persky used to hang around, and he's now a big Hollywood mogul.

ELDER: Remember the fellow who designed a building at Fairleigh Dickinson, the architect?

KURTZMAN: Leon Gehorsam. John Severin rented space, and a guy by the name of Bob Sale, who I think has died since.

ELDER: And we had a Frenchman who was unique. Rene Goscinny is now a very famous individual in France. He's a lot better off than we are. A delightful man. [*Note: Goscinny died since this interview took place.*]

KURTZMAN: A lot of good people came in then.

ELDER: It was a kind of a hub for meeting interesting people. Frankie Dorsey, of course, who now teaches art in Switzerland at an all girl college. Very talented guy. And through the contacts, we finally felt that we should concentrate our efforts towards one particular area. That was EC comics.

We're omitting one thing here that I think is important. Harvey had a syndicated strip going in the *Herald-Tribune*. It was short-lived, but it was very unique at the time. There was nothing like it out then. You know, today you have *B.C.*, and you have all these little simple one gag things. In fact, it was the forerunner, I think, of *B.C.* today.

KURTZMAN: I don't know if it was the forerunner . . .

ELDER: I think it was. Well, anyway, nothing preceded it, so let's assume that.

WAITRESS: *Coffee?*

ELDER: Yes, please. That was an account that kept us all paying the rent. Harvey would be bringing in the money . . .

KURTZMAN: Harvey would always be paying the rent.

ELDER: Harvey was the breadwinner! I think he wanted moral support. He couldn't stand working alone.

KURTZMAN: I'll never forget when I got married, when I went on my honeymoon, and I came back and the whole thing had collapsed. Charlie had gone to Europe, and he left me holding the bag. Jeezus, the place was a wreck. And nobody was there . . . I think you had gone back to work . . .

ELDER: And I think our lease was up. The landlord was the restaurateur downstairs. The lease was up and I think he was a little hesitant in renewing it to us. There were all these people walking up all the time. Not into his restaurant, but upstairs. Something was going on. Free lunches or something. You see, eventually, due to the account Harvey landed at EC, we abandoned the place, because there was a place to go.

There was a source of steady work.

And then, lo and behold, *Mad* was born. And all of the zany things that at least *I* had been doing in the past were now put into two-dimensional form. It was kind of a change for me, because I wasn't propelled into the public, as I was in school. I worked quietly at home.

KURTZMAN: One thing I've always felt that the world missed out on . . . if Willie could have been a performer . . .

ELDER: If I were a performer, I wouldn't be doing as zany as I am right now in my cartooning. My energies would be elsewhere.

KURTZMAN: I've got little bits of film of Willie that I took on Cape Cod. We were out there once with Jack Davis when we were all young, with our wives.

ELDER: Amateur movies.

KURTZMAN: And Will was always so funny on film! So funny! It's a shame he could have never been a stand-up performer. Of course, he was much too self-conscious to have been a performer.

ELDER: I was. And still am.

KURTZMAN: Self-conscious to the point that when he knows someone is watching him special, he collapses.

ELDER: Well, that's the reason I sublimate all my energies into my work. Because it's safe for me. I'm hiding. Like most comedians and most actors. A lot of actors are terrible interviewees. Anything outside the role they're playing, they're completely lost. They hide behind their character. Because there's a need. There's an inhibition that has to break loose somewhere. In my case it was the very same thing. I'd hide behind this zany cartoon, this zany thing on paper, which is very safe for me.

BENSON: *You probably didn't work very directly with Harvey on the war books, since you did the inking.*

ELDER: Not really. Well, we did at times, yes, because . . .

KURTZMAN: John and Will were a great war magazine team. John was good at the authenticity of the thing.

ELDER: It took me days to look up something, and there were deadlines to be made. Severin would do the pencilling and I would do the inking, because he was much faster at pencilling than I was.

KURTZMAN: John has an enormous capacity for the war authenticity. He loved war [*chuckles*]. He loved costumes and he loved guns. Will had none of that, but on the other hand Will was a great graphic artist.

EARLY ONE AFTERNOON, ON THE BASEBALL FIELD OF PLAINVIEW HIGH SCHOOL....
TAKE THAT BACK WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT MY DAD
OOOF!
I WON'T TAKE BACK ANYTHING! BUT I'LL MAKE YOU EAT THOSE WORDS YOU SAID ABOUT MY POP!
SMACK
HEY! YOU TWO. JIM AND TOM 'CUT OUT THE CIVIL WAR WHAT'S GOT INTO YOU ALL OF A SUDDEN?
WHAT KIND OF A TEAM'S PLAINVIEW GOING TO HAVE WHEN THE STAR PITCHER AND CATCHER GO AT ONE ANOTHER LIKE THAT, HAMMER AND TONGS? PULL 'EM APART, BOYS
COACH
I'VE BEEN TELLING YOU ALL SEASON LONG A TEAM IS ONLY AS GOOD AS 'IS TEAMWORK' AND IF WE CAN'T LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER WE MIGHT JUST AS WELL TURN IN OUR SPIKES AND CALL IT A DAY! NOW SHAKE HANDS
NOT ME! I'M OFF THAT GUY FOR LIFE!
TURN IT AROUND AND IT GOES DOUBLE FOR ME!
W-WHAT? EITHER YOU SHAKE OR GO BACK TO THE GROWERS! WHICH'LL IT BE?
I WOULDN'T SHAKE HIS HAND FOR ANYTHING!
BEING HIS FRIEND IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN STICK ON THE TEAM.. THEN I GUESS I'M THROUGH!
OKAY TURN IN YOUR UNIFORMS!
P
Z

Pencilling by Severin; inking by Kurtzman. The story's title is "Partners in Production," but where it appeared (if at all) is unknown.

BENSON: *They could capture this feeling of the period.*

KURTZMAN: Well, of course, because Will was through the real thing. Will was in the war.

ELDER: I must add that I was trying awfully hard to make a good product. In the first place, I wanted very much to satisfy Harvey. Because Harvey was in a very precarious situation; he was turning out books as an editor. And I was a good friend of Harvey's. And then here was a chance for me to break in slowly, to become a little more confident in my own work. I wasn't confident as a penciller because I was very slow. I was very deliberate. I didn't have the ability to grasp things quickly, as John did. John had a storehouse in his mind. He knew a uniform without even looking it up. Remarkable! I admired him for it.

KURTZMAN: Then Will would come along with his inkpots . . .

ELDER: It was the artist again. It was the art feeling I had for those things.

KURTZMAN: . . . and he would turn the thing into a graphically clear, clean, understandable drawing. So it was a partnership of talents, that was very useful. They complemented each other. And they did some of the finest stuff in that partnership that was ever done in the genre of war books. And what bothered me during that period was that John Severin never quite understood what Will was all about.

ELDER: 'Til he inked it himself.

KURTZMAN: John never understood Will's graphics. To this day he is weak graphically. He doesn't know what to do with his ink.

BENSON: *He certainly does now. Maybe not when he first started on his own.*

ELDER: He developed. I don't know that I agree with Harvey completely on that. At the beginning, when he went on his own, his stuff was well drawn, but linear, weak. It didn't have the dramatic punch, that overall black-and-white graphic quality that Harvey's trying to point out. Therefore it lost the story emphasis that it needed. It was a—what's the word?—a neuter as far as art was concerned. It didn't have any kind of sex at all, to speak of. At the same time I had built up confidence and I began to draw. I drew very slowly. But the knowledge of my own dramatics of black-and-white helped me a great deal. I think everything we did in the past, actually, helped us grow, develop. And under Harvey's editorialship it was all consumated.

BENSON: *Your work in* Mad *seemed to spring fully developed. From the beginning your stories were quite different from the other stories.*

ELDER: I was always a cut-up, as I mentioned before, and I felt that if I could expose this zaniness, this bottled-up zaniness in me, in some kind of medium, I would really burst forth, you know. Explode.

BENSON: *Did you recognize that immediately?*

ELDER: Yes, I did. Because I was always doing this sort of thing. I mean, war stories weren't my cup of tea. I did it because it was a living, it was a chance to get into the business and work at it, and develop techniques. But *Mad* gave me a tremendous amount of license. Which most comedians need. Any society needs comic license in order to survive. I always feel, speaking of comedians, that they're actors to begin with. There's the pathos and the comedy involved in acting . . .

KURTZMAN: You're missing . . .

ELDER: Wait, wait, I'm not finished . . .

KURTZMAN: Will was always full of all kinds of humor creativity. It amazed me when Will went to work on *Mad* that there was this unbelievable proliferation of creative . . . he had all this creative humor.

ELDER: It was uncontrolled, in a great sense. I need

Harvey's control. He harnessed whatever energies I had into the proper channeling. Let me say something that I think is very apropos. Harpo Marx wouldn't be Harpo without Chico and Groucho. But Groucho could be Groucho without Harpo or Chico. Harpo was offset against the kind of organization, the zany organization that Groucho formulated, in a sense. He made everything seem ridiculous, through wordage. And Harpo emphasized everything he was saying through his actions.

BENSON: *That's a great analogy.*

ELDER: And I felt that all my wild energies had to be harnessed into saying something important, something where it needed to be said. And I think Harvey had that great gift of editing all these people that came under his umbrella, so to speak, and control it beautifully.

BENSON: *In the early* Mad, *did Harvey inspect your pencils or make suggestions?*

ELDER: Well . . .

KURTZMAN: Oh, did I! I'd drive everybody crazy!

ELDER: Yes, yes he did.

KURTZMAN: I must say that I—and I think Willie can corroborate this—I was never easy to work for.

ELDER: That's only true for those who opposed your methods. I saw Harvey's methods, you know. The only thing I regretted was going home and doing things again. But I saw the reasoning behind it all. So it wasn't that bad. It made it less Draconian, let me put it that way.

BENSON: *When you compare your* Panic *stories with your* Mad *stories, the* stories *were inferior, but your contribution is still the same.*

ELDER: Well, because that was basically me. It was just another editor. But the fact is, I had to work harder, because Feldstein, I felt, at the time, didn't have that natural philosophical humor that Harvey had. Harvey was *thoughtful* in his humor. And it was well plotted.

BENSON: *Did you write any stories on your own? Didn't you write "Mole" [Mad # 2]?*

ELDER: Well, the Mole was essentially something I'd been playing with for years. You know, it was some kind of a fantasy of mine that Harvey put into a reasonable structure and made it more possible to read.

BENSON: *What did you do—did you draft the story out and give it to Harvey to break down?*

ELDER: Yeah, Harvey always did.

KURTZMAN: I always broke it down.

ELDER: Harvey's great directorship, you know. This character was a mole. He was ostracized, he was kind of a pariah of society. And the only way I can symbolize that is by having this guy looking like a mole, underground. He had to go underground in order to survive. And he's thrown in jail and digs his way out. It's really a gag—it was a play on words, in a sense, pictorializing it.

BENSON: *Did you ever write anything else?*

ELDER: I did for *Panic.* Yes, I did.

BENSON: *Was it your idea to do "The Night Before Christmas" [Panic # 1]?*

ELDER: I was given that particular assignment. I embellished it, and completely destroyed the original. [*He looks over the* EC Checklist.] I see a few things here. "Smiddy" [Panic *# 4*] might be one. I'm not sure, but I think so. I played very strongly on the comics. In fact, Feldstein used to *ask* me to write, because he was burdened with other stories. He had *Tales from the Crypt,* was it? And he had other stuff, so he asked me to fill in. So he said, "Hey, Will, go to town! Do as you please. If you're not working for *Mad* . . ."

BENSON: *You wrote your own script and everything?*

ELDER: Yeah. Of course, Feldstein would oversee everything, make sure it fit the proper page length, and was in on time. He'd give me complete freedom.

BENSON: *How about* Mad*?*

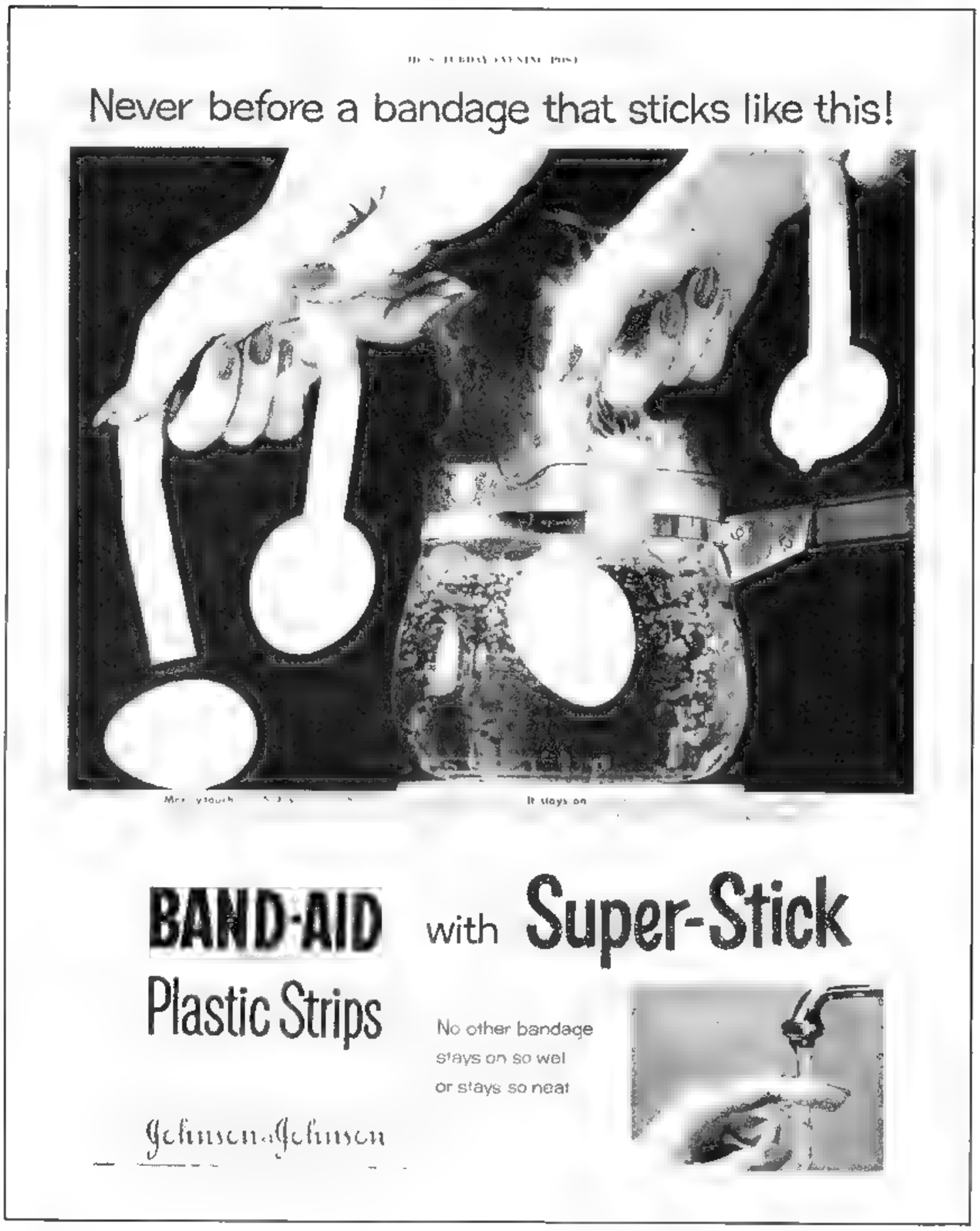
ELDER: That was pretty much Harvey.

KURTZMAN: I wrote everything.

ELDER: But, you see, Harvey had given me complete license and freedom to fit anything I wanted within his story form, which I did. I actually *re*created a lot of things without destroying the original script, if that was possible. But that's what I loved about the magazine. Because here was a chance to do what I pleased, to run amok, so to speak.

BENSON: *What would you say is the difference between your working relationship at that time and today with* Annie Fanny*?*

KURTZMAN: Much freer.



A 1954 original ad and the "counterfeit" from the first issue of Mad *magazine. Kurtzman's text ridicules the copywriter's thinking, but the exact copy was a limiting device that he soon abandoned. His later efforts, where he parodied an ad campaign without copying any particular ad, were more subtle. An outstanding example was his deflation of the Container Corporation of America's pompous "Great Ideas of Western Man" "public service" series, in* Trump *# 2. Kurtzman's version (with appropriate arty design and Picasso-esque picture): "Gabby Spinoza on waiting for the law; 'Why wait for the law. Let's string em up now.' "*

Never before a bandage that sticks like this!
(just like woolen underwear)
Elder
BIND-AID with Super-Sticky
Plastic Strips
Stickier & Stickier
No other bandage sticks to dry eggs so well
WON'T LOOSEN IN WATER

what was funny, which was doing classic caricature, humorous illustration, worked very well with your script.

KURTZMAN: There's no doubt that Bernie is an intense artist. Certainly, he's the, I think, *the* outstanding artist in comic books. He had a feel for graphics second to nobody I can think of in the comics field. A sensitive, intelligent approach to comic graphics. There's no doubt about that. So in that department he gets good marks. But he *just* . . . for me, he didn't have the humor.

ELDER: I think there's types of senses of humor, if you can put it that way. There's always a sense of humor that seems to be appropriate for somebody. My sense of humor's on the zany side. It's slightly thought-out zaniness; it isn't just random. Because those running gags I had in my cartoons were all planned. They were apropos to what Harvey was trying to say. Bernie might have a sense of humor that appealed to you, but not in the sense of *Mad* comics. A different entirely type of humor.

KURTZMAN: Everybody has a different sense of humor. It really doesn't matter which way is up. *Except* . . . my problem with Bernie was that, whatever his humor was, he wouldn't get the point!

ELDER: The real reason is that Bernie made Harvey feel like a failure!

KURTZMAN: He would not get the point!

BENSON: *Both of these stories were experiments. And I felt that "From Eternity Back to Here" was a successful experiment. Krigstein's caricatures of the famous actors worked well with the story. I felt the other one wasn't as successful an experiment.*

ELDER: That's an interesting word you used: "experiment." That's the thing I miss about the old days. Well, actually "the old days" for me were rotten! It's just that we had fun; we couldn't repeat it because we'd look kind of ridiculous at this stage. But "experiment" was what was beautiful about those days, at least with *Mad*. Today, when everything is kind of structured and accurate and symmetric, you lose that freedom.

KURTZMAN: The thing is, working with Will and Jack Davis and Wally Wood, they always got the point. They knew what I was trying to say and they carried it forward. That's quite a difference, working with somebody who can carry a thing forward, as opposed to a guy who really doesn't know what it is you're getting at. So he carries it forward *his way*, not knowing where he's supposed to go. And that was the trouble.

BENSON: *I still say that in spite of the fact that he didn't do what you wanted him to do . . .*

KURTZMAN: It was a very good experiment, yeah.

BENSON: *What did* you *think of "Bringing Back Father?"*

ELDER: It was strange to me. I think I almost saw it the way Harvey did. I worked so hard at what *I* did, trying to make it as funny as I possibly could. Then, suddenly, it would be broken up by these very somber, very serious, almost depressing illustrations. It was a complete departure. I would rather have seen something a little clearer. I found it was cluttered, unclear. It was too designy.

BENSON: *That's why I had a problem with it. You're getting a stylized view of reality in "Bringing Up Father." And you weren't contrasting that with reality, you were just contrasting it with another stylized view of reality. I thought the contrast with reality worked better in "Mickey Rodent" [Mad # 19], with the real ducks at the end. His work was too*

ELDER: It was much freer, much more freewheeling then. This is a much tighter controlled medium we're working with now. Not only that, but we have about fifty million editors overseeing everything that's done, and corrections. That kind of limits . . .

KURTZMAN: The difference, basically, is that the *Mad* format was our own. The *Annie Fanny* format is as much Hefner's as it is ours.

ELDER: Yeah, that's true.

BENSON: *Can I ask about your collaboration with Bernie Krigstein on "Bringing Back Father" [Mad # 17]?*

ELDER: I liked Bernie very much. He's a very sensitive human being.

KURTZMAN: He was essentially a sweet man. He wasn't easy to work with though. He was never quite on target for me. He was partly on target—I mean, I'd chosen him for his very specific talent. I knew that he could get as close to that grim reality style as anybody. But he was never quite on target, never quite understood the humor.

ELDER: He didn't feel it. I don't think he was *there.*

KURTZMAN: The problem is that Bernie, God bless him, was never a humorist.

BENSON: *I thought he did a wonderful job on "From Eternity Back to Here" [Mad # 12].*

KURTZMAN: Maybe so, but I tell you, Bernie is not a funny guy. Not a funny guy.

ELDER: No, I think he's a serious artist.

KURTZMAN: Serious.

BENSON: *In "From Eternity Back to Here" his sense of*

DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT M. SEVERIN
GENERAL, LE MAQUIS FIELD MARSHAL, C.O. H. KURTZMAN
DISPATCH-RIDER LIAISON-CORP. J. DEFUCCIO
PICKET-BOTANIST W. ELDER
SCOUT-DIETICIAN J. SEVERIN
GALVANIZED YANKEE-SHARPSHOOTER J. DAVIS
BALLOON OBSERVER UNION A.F. W. WOOD

Here's the crew of the EC war comics as seen by John Severin. These two studies (brought together here for the first time since they were drawn in the early fifties) show that Severin's keen sense of observation could be effectively—and affectionately—applied to caricature. Note that the implied comment on Woody's authenticity above has been somewhat softened in the (presumably later) version below. In fact, only De Fuccio's pose, which reflects the respect Severin had for his close friend, remains the same in both drawings. Elder's rank of "botanist" refers to an infamous head-to-toe case of poison ivy that he once caught.

DON'T TREAD
ON
FIRST AID & COLORING KIT
GENERAL, LE MAQUIS FIELD-MARSHAL, C.O. H. KURTZMAN
CHIEF SCOUT, DIETICIAN J. SEVERIN
GALVENIZED YANKEE, SHARPSHOOTER J. DAVIS
LANCE CORPORAL, BANNERMAN W. WOOD
PICKET, BOTANIST W. ELDER
DISPATCH-RIDER, LIASSON-CORPORAL J. DEFUCCIO
AMAZON-NURSE M. SEVERIN

stylized to contrast properly.

KURTZMAN: It was worse than that. He didn't understand the humor. What he should have done was, he should have said, "OK, I'm going to do something like"—I don't know why, but Art Young comes to mind—"Art Young's drawings of poverty." It had to be someone who could do a grim picture with a twinkle in his eye, who knew that when he was drawing the grimness he had his finger on the side of his nose. He was fooling you. But Bernie didn't do that. He did funny grimness, grimness in slapstick.

ELDER: I'll tell you what I saw. I saw clutter. There wasn't enough clarity to distinguish what he was saying. Maybe if it had been clearer . . .

KURTZMAN: Bernie didn't have any problem in clarity. He was a great graphic cartoonist. It just wasn't funny. But you're right about when Willie did that Donald Duck thing, that Willie made the point. The same point.

BENSON: *Davis did the same thing in "The Countynental" [Mad # 14], the TV show parody. It was all cartooning until the end, and then when you saw the men behind the camera it was very realistic.*

KURTZMAN: Right. You see now, Jack had the twinkle in his eye. Jack understood. It's interesting, the guys who have humor. Take a guy like Wally Wood, who's so introverted that you don't know what his talent is, because he never talks. But Wally had a nice sense of humor. And when he sat down and put his hand to the thing the humor would be all right.

ELDER: What did you think of our take-offs on the ads, the magazine ads?

BENSON: *When I first saw them I thought they were amazing. Nothing like that had ever been done before!*

ELDER: That's not entirely true. *Judge* magazine did things like that.

BENSON: *But they never did it with the understanding.*

KURTZMAN: There was a time when nobody used to do the counterfeit. We would do a counterfeit parody, at great expense. You understand what I mean when I say "counterfeit"?

ELDER: It looked authentic, but it wasn't.

KURTZMAN: Right. Where your parody is carried to that extreme where you render it with the same meticulousness that the original was. Up until then, parodies had been done traditionally in all the college magazines, but they would always be extremely crude parodies. And we brought in the concept of creating pleasure not only for the idea of the parody, but the idea plus the actual rendering.

BENSON: *But beyond that, your idea of what was funny about an ad was unique. You'd get to the heart of Madison Avenue's idea of building a whole campaign around something that's irrelevant to the product. My favorite was your line, "No other bandage sticks to dry eggs so well."*

ELDER: To me it was the playing down of the public's intelligence. Harvey got to the germ, the target.

KURTZMAN: Madison Avenue was always a good target. The frame of reference on Madison Avenue is to sell. And *our* frame of reference is the truth.

ELDER: Irrelevant . . . exploitative . . .

KURTZMAN: Madison Avenue has no desire to tell us things that are true and honest. Their first problem is to make you buy a product. So, very often, they lie. If you understand a lie, then you can make it funny, satirize it.

BENSON: *Even more often they tell you an irrelevant truth. If they can't tell you the truth about their product, they tell you something that's true but unrelated and hope that you'll think they've said something true about the product. You would expose this by pointing out that their truth had nothing to do with the product.*

KURTZMAN: And consequently wasn't the truth.

ELDER: It was a form of brainwashing, let's put it that way. They made you believe what they wanted you to believe. And I think Harvey saw that.

BENSON: *Your collaboration on* Annie Fanny *has somewhat changed over the years. Harvey has become more directly involved in the art.*

KURTZMAN: Basically, we started out working with a large group of people. The whole idea was to cover a lot of work . . .

ELDER: . . . in a short amount of time . . .

KURTZMAN: . . . by using a large team. And over the years we slowly discovered that it was more heartache than it was worth. I'm speaking for myself, I don't know about you, Will.

ELDER: Oh, it was heartache.

KURTZMAN: We came down to a system the two of us could handle. I think the results are a lot more artistic and a lot more gratifying.

ELDER: A lot clearer. There's no clutter and confusion, that's the main thing. Because we were getting a crazy-quilt of different, not only techniques but attitudes, senses of humor.

KURTZMAN: A crazy-quilt of problems!

ELDER: Problems, right. It wasn't solving our time problem, it was adding to it.

KURTZMAN: The product is now much more satisfying, for me, artistically. I find that I like the strip now better than ever before. I think that we did some god-awful stuff working with a team, which really sets my teeth on edge. [*Kurtzman's 1982 comment: "We're back to the team system again now, with apprentices Sarah Downs and Phil Felix."*]

BENSON: *Do you mean in terms of the visuals? Or in terms of the total . . .*

KURTZMAN: In terms of the overall product. There was a time that we had a deadline for a Christmas issue, and we just threw everybody into it. We flew to Chicago, and we all worked out of The Mansion. We made our deadline. But it was just awful stuff.

ELDER: The thing was perplexing to me because they all tried to adapt to the technique that I started with originally, which was crude, actually.

KURTZMAN: It was the weirdest integration of talent.

ELDER: And they tried to assimilate all these various talents into one conglomeration, one blob. It just didn't gel.

KURTZMAN: Now *there* was an experiment for the books.

ELDER: Frazetta I think did some marvelous things and he did some disappointing things.

BENSON: *It was interesting that, with the possible exception of Heath, these guys just made no accommodation in terms of their styles. There'd be a Jack Davis guy standing next to an Arnold Roth character . . .*

KURTZMAN: They tried. They all tried.

BENSON: *It wasn't evident at all. It was like a jam.*

ELDER: It reminds me of those early movies like *The Big Broadcast of 1937,* or something, where everybody'd come in and do the thing they did normally on radio—a nothing picture. It was a cacophony of artists.

KURTZMAN: It was an interesting experiment.

ELDER: I'll tell you, I enjoyed the socializing. We got the guys together up at the Algonquin Hotel. We ordered eggs benedict for breakfast, living high off the *Playboy* hog. It was wonderful. We knew the bubble would burst, but . . .

KURTZMAN: We have marvelous memories of working as a team.

ELDER: It was fun, it was fun.

BENSON: *There's been a trend from the beginning of* Mad *through* Goodman Beaver *to* Annie Fanny *of less and less background clutter, to the point where, today, there's very little.*

ELDER: You mean it's simplified?

BENSON: *The little gags, the signs.*

KURTZMAN: Tchatchkas.

ELDER: Well, that's something that's been disappearing.

BENSON: *It was so much a part of the early* Mad, *especially in your work.*

ELDER: It's kind of an evolutionary thing, for several reasons. And one is that the policy of *Playboy* is a little different than *Mad.* They felt that they wanted to get away from the cluttered look of *Mad.* They didn't want to look like anything that *Mad* had ever done before. *Playboy* was a sophisticated magazine. A different format. Therefore, keep it within that framework. We don't want any *Mad* cartoonists in this book. We want your talent but not your *Mad* talent.

BENSON: *We want you but not what you do?*

ELDER: Right. Your politics can be anything you please outside the magazine's realm. Another thing is that it's such a complicated technique. It's so time-consuming. Time, and technique, and the corrections that were involved in every single story—knowing how much time this absorbed, we had to cut down on some of it, to have our work appear alive. Otherwise it would never appear.

BENSON: *Harvey once showed me a photostat of his*

This Elder gag, drawn on the photostat of Kurtzman's rough layout of the story, didn't make it into the final strip. Few of them do. This story appeared in Playboy *January 1966. It was the seventeenth* Annie Fanny *to be completed but appeared out of sequence, a year late.*

roughs for an early Annie Fanny . . .

ELDER: Harvey draws so well. And his drawings have a lot of expression, which other artists don't have. Expression is what really sells a work, I think. And he gets the feeling of the character.

BENSON: *You had pencilled in all your ideas for gags in the margins of this photostat. Is that how you add your gags?*

KURTZMAN: Exactly that way.

ELDER: I'd read the story thoroughly, I'd try to understand . . . Harvey used to explain things a lot to all the artists. One thing I think we left out here, that's very important. And it's funny to me when I look back. When Harvey was the editor of *Mad* each artist would come into his office, and he would say, "Sit down, I got a story for you. I think it's something that *you* can handle." He'd start reading the story, and he'd go into this little act. Harvey would portray all the characters in the story. He'd take on these different voices. And he'd get carried away, he'd get emotional about it, you know. And I'd look at him like he's some kind of a nut. Here he is acting out this story that's supposed to be on paper. I think it was a very good idea, because it really emphasized the feeling that Harvey wanted to put in these pages. And some guys just didn't grasp his feelings for a story immediately—only when he acted them out, like a kid play-acting. I think it was a novel thing. No editor ever did that before. Who wants to take the time to do a thing like that. And he'd do that for me, too. But eventually over the years I kind of predicted Harvey's ideas and his thoughts, his sense of humor, and we each got to know how the other worked, we'd been "married" so long. We thought the same way, in the same vein. That doesn't exist any longer, that business of telling you the story out loud. He'd hand me the photostat of his ideas, I'd look at it, I'd read the story thoroughly. I'd know exactly what he's trying to portray here. Then I'd take the story, think of it as a whole, and interject ideas apropos to panels, the page and then eventually the whole story. I'd toss in everything, everything that could possibly be funny. I'd gag up the page, make it more humorous than it could be.

KURTZMAN: We *do* try to squeeze as much into a story as we can without graphic clutter. And that's something that Hefner really leaned on us for. And I'm not saying he was wrong. Because I think graphically we do good-looking pages. But we do, in another more subtle way, try to squeeze as much into a page as we possibly can. We try to squeeze in a lot of dialogue, a lot of gags per square inch. If you take one of our pages and compare it, say, with *Wicked Wanda*, and make an actual head count of the specific situations we have, you'll notice like a proportion of four to one.

BENSON: *Do you actually read* Wicked Wanda*?*

KURTZMAN: I have read it on occasion. I don't really keep up with it.

ELDER: I think it's slick. It's very attractive.

KURTZMAN: A piece of shit.

ELDER: I'd like to get back to a point I think is very important about the policy of *Playboy* compared to *Mad*. I think most comic book readers have conditioned themselves to look at everything, because it's broken down into panels and every panel has something to say. It can be pictorially detailed. You look at the art. *Playboy*, on the other hand, is really very simple. Very big, bold and direct. There isn't a clutter about *Playboy*. It's telling you one thing. It's telling you sex. I think it conditions their readers to see one thing and one thing only. So I think the policy lent itself to making things simplified, and in direct form. So you had to cut out all that *Mad* "garbage." At least, that's what they said. And I think that's the reason why it became simpler. The pace would have been slowed up tremendously if someone just saw gatefolds and photographs of the same girl in varied positions, or whatever, and then suddenly this cluttered page. I think it would break up the rhythm.

KURTZMAN: Also, remember that *Playboy* puts an awful lot of money into art direction. It's a well designed product. Good design means easy on the eye.

BENSON: *Do you have anything to say about* Goodman Beaver*?*

ELDER: Oh, gee! I was hoping you'd bring that up! Because I think, for me, that was the greatest time of my life. I really enjoyed it. There again, it had all the elements we were speaking of before. It had the freedom, the feeling to express yourself without too many editors peering over your shoulder. You know, the deadline's a constant bugbear to most

One Christmas during EC's heyday found Colin Dawkins working for J. Walter Thompson's London office. His drafty English winter was brightened by a packet of specially drawn Christmas cards from some stateside friends. Printed here are Elder's and Kurtzman's cards.

cartoonists, and the deadline was kind of reasonable, I thought. The sooner we got it in, the better, of course. I think it was the funniest thing we ever did, because of the fact that we had all that freedom.

BENSON: *Did you have any particular favorite stories?*

KURTZMAN: "Superman."

ELDER: "Superman" and "Playboy." Those two, I'd say. In fact, "Playboy" . . . that particular story is what impressed Hefner, I think.

KURTZMAN: Hefner used to show that story around and say, "If you want to see what Harvey believes in, read this story." Because, in a sense it was a put-down (of the would-be playboy). But it probably was what led to *Annie Fanny*, you're right. The whole idea of *Annie Fanny* was to do *Goodman Beaver* as a girl. That's the way it started.

ELDER: Right, the innocence.

KURTZMAN: Goodman Beaver, of course, was fashioned after Candide.

ELDER: Or Pinocchio, for that matter.

KURTZMAN: In my mind it was Candide, very specific. The innocent boob who runs athwart of the problems of the world.

ELDER: He meets Hugh Pangloss . . .

BENSON: *Do you recall the problem of the panel shape in the paperback reprint [The Executive's Comic Book]?*

ELDER: We had to get a certain dimension, yeah. That was a pain in the butt.

KURTZMAN: Work. We were doing the strip, and then we got a paperback contract, so we started doing the panels longer for the paperback format. And we would cut it short for the magazine. But then we had to take all the stories that we'd done before that and doctor them for the book.

ELDER: I wish you'd dwell a little bit on *Humbug*, because I thought very highly of that magazine. *Humbug* was the magazine, I think, that we all fell in love with. Unfortunately, it wasn't slick enough, or it wasn't exposed properly. There's a million stories that could be told about that. Money, and despondent artists not going anywhere. I didn't contribute that much to *Humbug*. I did a few things.

KURTZMAN: Oh, Will, you did one of the best stories ever—that Frankenstein thing [Humbug # *7*].

ELDER: Oh, that's right! Well, that was one of the rare ones. Yeah, that was a good one. The story I liked, by the way, was "Robinson Crusoe" [Mad # *13*]. I get so many letters and phone calls on "Robinson Crusoe." Most people fall in love with that one.

KURTZMAN: Isn't that funny. The one that I remember is "Shermlock Shomes" [Mad # *7*]. And the Katzenjammer Kids [Mad # *20*]. That was one of my best story structures. And you followed through on it, Will. And then Skeezix and Corky ["*Gasoline Valley*," Mad # *15*]. When Will and I hit it right, we really hit. Willie just crowded "Shermlock Shomes" with tchatchkas.

ELDER: Well, it was crude, it was crude. But I wasn't thinking of artistic technique. I was thinking of pure unadulterated humor, to get as crazy as I possibly could within the story limits. That's what I was after.

BENSON: *It's amazing how much those early* Mads *influenced my whole way of thinking.*

KURTZMAN: They've influenced a lot of people. You know, I was sitting yesterday with Brian McConnachie, one of the early *Lampoon* guys. Very bright guy. I was sitting, as a matter of fact, with a group of guys, all very talented young cartoonists . . .

ELDER: So that's why you're not home working.

KURTZMAN: These guys were all in the right time-slot to have read the original *Mad*. It changed their—well, it didn't *change* their lives, but it really inspired them.

ELDER: That's why they got low scores on their SAT's?

KURTZMAN: They insisted that they went into the business because of that stuff. And I do think that's the way things work. I think we happened to be in the right place. We're in the hands of forces we don't quite understand. The process is marvelous. If you can fire people up, inspire people, unleash forces . . .

ELDER: It's like, what makes people stage struck. They see someone else and they're inspired.

KURTZMAN: But *Annie Fanny* doesn't inspire the same response. It's fascinating to me the way *Annie Fanny* doesn't affect people the way the old *Mad* did. But it doesn't. We probably get more integrity in the eyes of Mr. Man-in-the-street through *Annie Fanny*. You say, "Hey, we do *Annie Fanny*," and everybody goes, "Aha!" But if you say, "Hey, you know I did the early *Mad*," or, "I did *Humbug*," or "*Goodman Beaver*," they go, "Wha?" And yet, I haven't met anybody who's said, "You know, my whole life has changed because of *Annie Fanny*.

ELDER: There might be some, there might be some.

KURTZMAN: Whereas I'm constantly running into people who tell me their whole life *was* changed by the early *Mad.*

ELDER: What's your opinion of *Annie Fanny*, honestly, John?

BENSON: *It's hampered by the necessity to have a story line in which Annie undresses.*

ELDER: I say the same. I say the same. Of course, there are always limitations and you have to recognize them. For what it is, under the circumstances, it's . . . I hate to use the Marx Brothers as my prototype here for what I want to express, but I have to because it's so handy. Now, the Marx Brothers, when they made their films later on like *A Night in Casablanca* . . . not every Marx Brothers picture's a *A Night at the Opera.* You see, it doesn't have that class and humor at the same time. Something's lost.

KURTZMAN: What happened was, when the Marx Brothers first started, their pictures were old-fashioned Thalberg Hollywood.

ELDER: Only two. *A Night at the Opera, A Day at the Races.*

KURTZMAN: I'm saying it was that type of operation.

BENSON: *Their early stuff was before that, though.*

ELDER: At Paramount, yeah. *Cocoanuts, Animal Crackers* . . .

KURTZMAN: An enormous amount of material was poured into the making of the picture. There was painstaking plotting, there were the Marx Brothers, and there were the writers and the writers and the writers. As time went on they started making quickies, doing schlock stuff . . .

ELDER: *Go West; The Big Store,* which was all right, actually; *Love Happy* . . .

KURTZMAN: . . . where the plots went out the window—no thinking was given to the plot. The Marx Brothers dominated everything, which they shouldn't have. Chico needed money, so they started grinding out the pictures. And the content just went to hell. Now in *Annie Fanny* the situation is different. There's a confusion of purpose. There always has been. Is it a sex cartoon? Is it a satire? What is it? The satire really is overwhelmed by the sex. Because you never see it as satirical stories. They're jerk-off stories. There are a lot of guys who, I'm sure, do get the details. But that's not what people go to it for. Although I wish they would, because it's there! But I think people see it as a sexy strip. Which is what it was designed as from the very beginning. But I think the sex does violence to the satire.

ELDER: It counteracts it. Very much.

BENSON: *How long is it from the time you conceive a story to its completion?*

KURTZMAN: It can take anywhere from five to eight months.

ELDER: It's such a complicated mess.

BENSON: *Do they wait until you turn one in before scheduling it?*

KURTZMAN: Yeah. It's so involved.

BENSON: *Because it seems to me that very often you're picking up on a trend that's just about a year old.*

KURTZMAN: Exactly. Old hat.

ELDER: Bert Parks may die and there goes the Miss America stories. In fact, we just did something on Howard Hughes, Inc., and he just *died.* Right in the middle of a story he went and died on me. The nerve of him. Howard Hughes, Inc., the invisible man. I've got this guy unraveling himself, you know. His license plate is "zero." But some people might be offended by it now that he's dead. The medical centers, or maybe—what's the name of the place out in Salt Lake City?—the Mormon Tabernacle might be offended by this idea. But that's the risk we take with humor. That happened all the time with *Mad.* Letters of litigation kept coming in.

BENSON: *I recall that they took the McCarthy hearing satire out of* The Mad Reader *paperback when McCarthy died.*

ELDER: In deference to his good side, I guess, whatever that happened to be. Anyhow, I feel about *Annie* pretty much the way you do, that visually, it's very atrractive. And then you start breaking it down, and it sort of leads you into making sex more acute, more sharp, more readable, if that's possible. If it were done in "line," I don't think it would have the same impact.

BENSON: *Is it true that some time after* Trump *folded you were actually doing wash renderings for real advertisements?*

"The Mole Meets Annie" was drawn especially for Dick Voll, and is printed with his permission.

ELDER: No, not for advertisements. Well, for TV corporations. I worked for some TV outfit for awhile. And I did some movie ads for 20th Century Fox—*Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation* with Jimmy Stewart.

KURTZMAN: Well, he used to work in the agency. And, if I'm not mistaken, he did these storyboards. They have a name for these things where they actually make moving visuals, limited animation film for customer presentations.

ELDER: Then I did rendering for Whitman Chocolates. Big things, they put them on billboards. Some ten second ads. We're paying for this interview aren't we, Harvey? This is on me fellas.

KURTZMAN: Oh, we'll all chip in.

ELDER: We'll split the check three ways. [*Pantomimes tearing bill into three parts.*] I didn't give him my munchkin imitation did I?

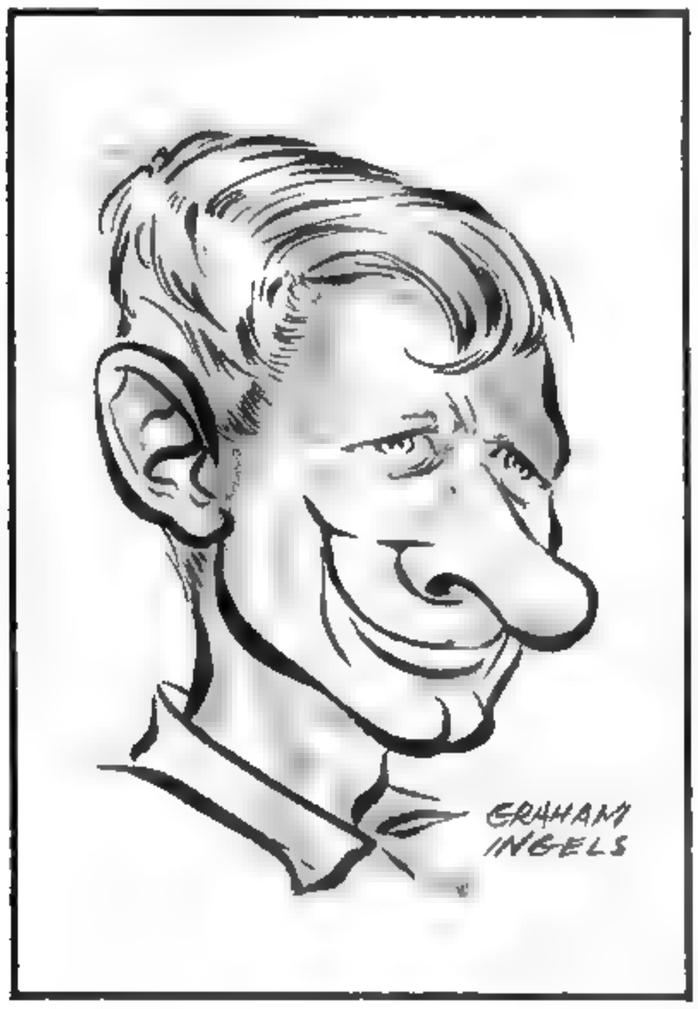
KURTZMAN: Pleasant little place isn't it?

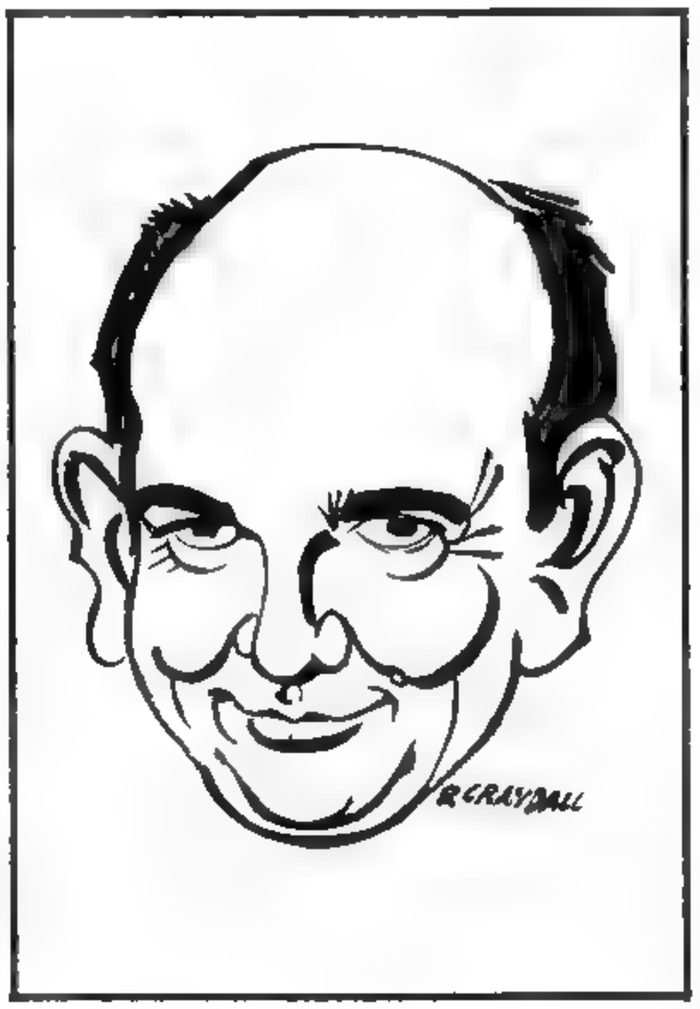
ELDER: Nice and homey, very cozy. That's how you tell a place. Not by the eggs and bacon. I mean, anybody gives you good eggs and bacon. But the hamburger was excellent. That's tricky.

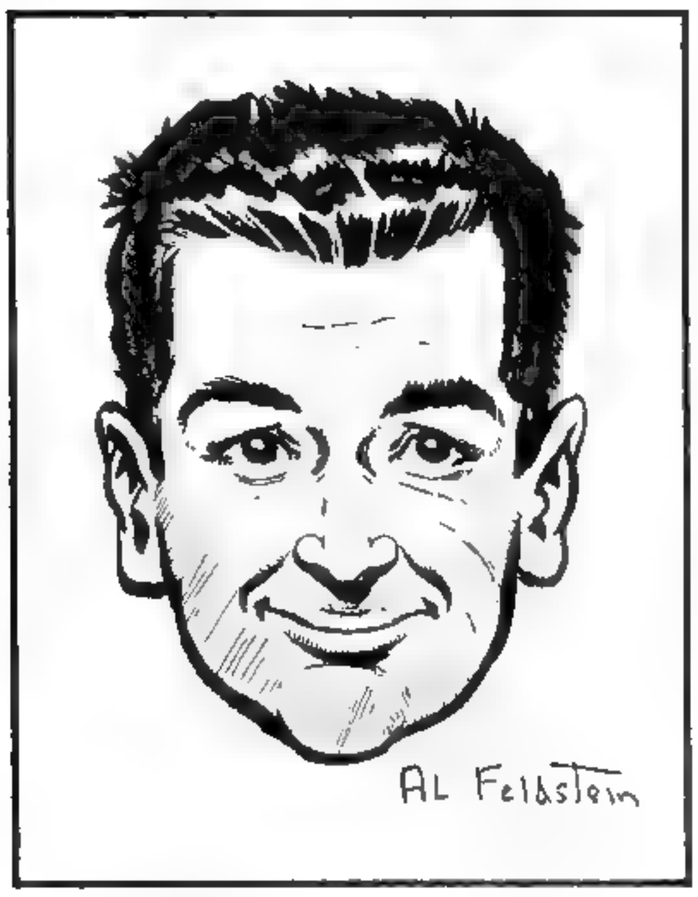
This interview was recorded on April 8, 1976. It was transcribed by Joey Cavalieri, and edited for publication by John Benson.

A ROGUES GALLERY

When Marie Severin got her own office at EC, she went out and bought a batch of Woolworths 4" x 5" frames and had all the guys do self-portraits for her wall. Wally did his rear view as a gag; after Marie calmed down, he pulled out the "real" one. (The toothy gentleman carrying the portfolio is John Putnam, in case you were puzzled.)





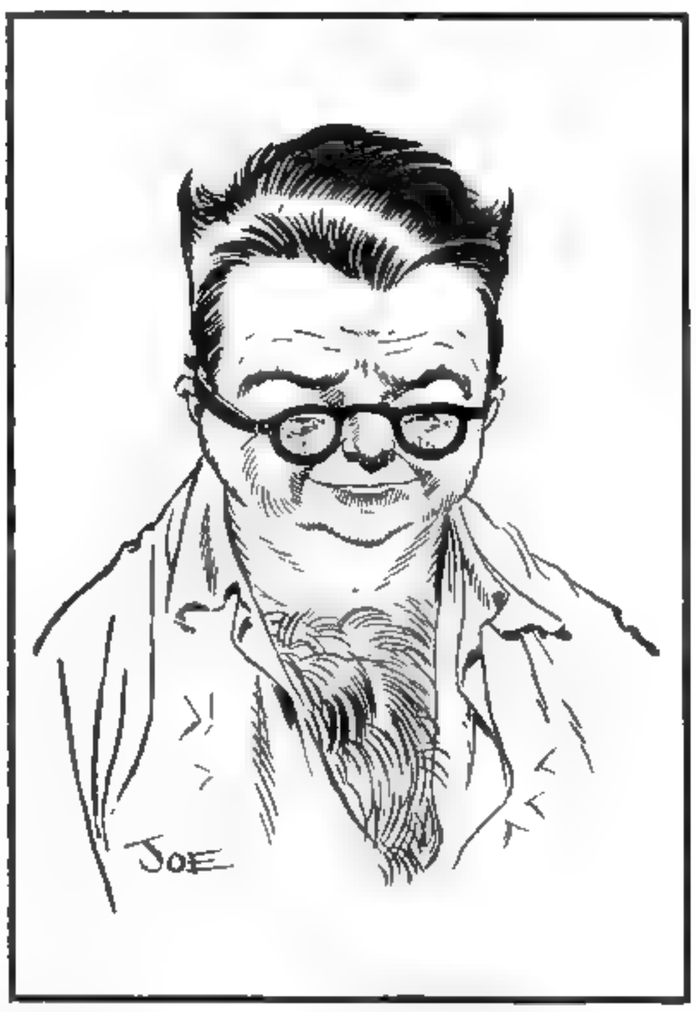


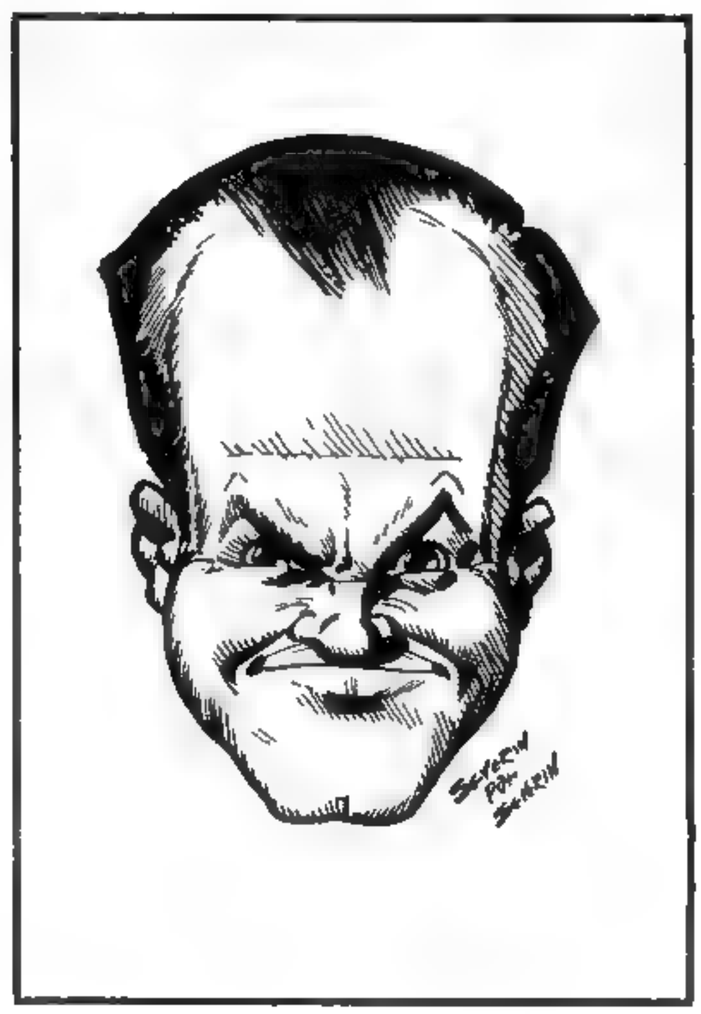
Elder
THIS NUT IS FOR
THE WALL!

B. Krigstein

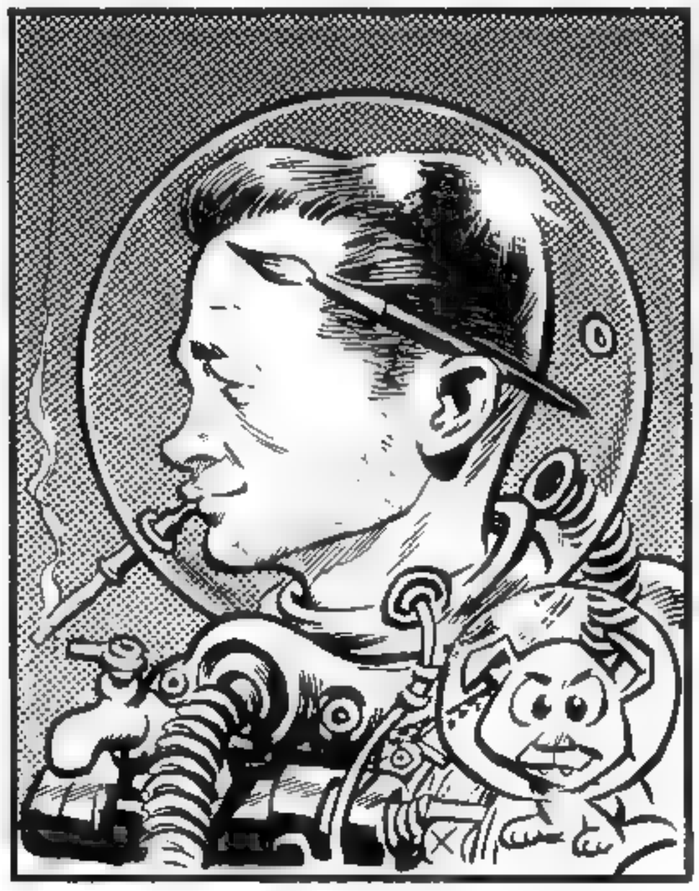
FOR PITY'S SAKE, MARIE... YOU'VE GOT THE FRAME MOVED OVER TOO FAR-
-Harvey

GEORGE


JOE



Al Williamson



wood

A CONVERSATION WITH HARVEY KURTZMAN AND BILL GAINES

Illustration copyright © 1983 William M. Gaines.

BENSON: *Do you recall when you first met Harvey?*

GAINES: Oh, yes. Harvey was sent up to our outfit by an educator. His name may have been Dr. Sones.

KURTZMAN: It wasn't Zorbaugh, was it? Because I remember I went to see him once.

GAINES: Right. It was Harvey Zorbaugh, because he had been associated with my father. He was on the editorial advisory board of Educational Comics when we were putting out things like *Picture Stories from American History*. So was Sones; that's why I mixed the two of them up.

Of course we were publishing anything and everything but educational comics by the time Harvey walked in, but he didn't know that, and he showed up with a stack of fantastically funny one-pagers. I guess they were mostly *Hey Look*, or maybe they were all *Hey Look*. What Harvey had in mind to do was humorous educational comics.

BENSON: *You had done some educational comics already, right?*

KURTZMAN: No, I'd played around with the idea of educational comics. I was trying to get somebody interested in—not comics, really, but educational graphics, was one thing that I was working on. I was trying to explain the ulcer graphically.

GAINES: Well, Harvey walked in, and we rapidly advised him that we were not the proper outfit for that. However, as long as he was there, he showed us his *Hey Look*'s. And I remember I was sitting at my desk, and Al Feldstein was looking over my shoulder, and we were going through one of these after another, and, you know, it was building. We chuckled at the first few, and by the end of this mess we were . . .

KURTZMAN: *Laughing*!

GAINES: We were just dying, our stomachs ached with laughter. So we agreed that we had to get this talent. But how—he didn't fit at all into what we were doing. But we tried to make him fit. And the early stuff that Harvey did, he was very uncomfortable with. We put him in horror comics where he was not happy.

KURTZMAN: I did that cowboy thing [*Lucky Fights It Through*].

GAINES: Oh, the very first thing, yeah. I guess we did give him something which almost approached educational comics.

KURTZMAN: The syphilis story. I don't think you saw how to apply my talents, because you'd just seen my funny stuff. So I got involved with your uncle on that thing. It was kind of a commercial throwaway, something that you guys weren't really interested in.

GAINES: We weren't the least bit interested in it.

KURTZMAN: I was secretly trying to show you I could do adventure cartoons, which Al didn't particularly believe, one way or the other, because he didn't see any evidence. And when I did the cowboy thing, then he had the evidence that I *might* be able to do adventure cartoons.

GAINES: I'd forgotten that.

BENSON: *You had known Al Feldstein in school, right? Was there anyone else you knew at EC at that time?*

KURTZMAN: Al was the only Music and Arter. But we really didn't know each other. We were in totally different classes. I have to tell you a story from when I was at the High School of Music and Art. I remember one of the awful things I did at the time. I was terrible. I took it into my head that it was the greatest thing there was to throw glass bottles on the cement floor in the lunchroom. I thought it was just terrific. And this fellow came over and said, "You'd better not do that—you'll get in trouble." And he was absolutely right, it was terrible. And that guy was Al Feldstein.

GAINES: That's a marvelous story.

BENSON: *Were the first stories you did for EC written by Al?*

KURTZMAN: Yes.

GAINES: In those days Al wasn't even writing them. I remember a haunted house story that Harvey did that was written by Ivan Klapper, I think.

KURTZMAN: I'm pretty sure that was Al's story.

BENSON: *When did you start writing your own stories?*

KURTZMAN: There were several phases that we moved through. First there were the ones where somebody else actually wrote the words, and I think "House of Horror" and "Madness at Manderville" fell into that category, and maybe there were others. The next phase was that I would write the story myself after the plot had been established somehow.

GAINES: "Sounds from Another World" we stole from *Esquire*, remember?

KURTZMAN: No, that was from *The New Yorker*.

GAINES: No, I remember it as being *Esquire*.

KURTZMAN: No, I'd bet on it. [*Kurtzman is correct. Roald Dahl's "The Sound Machine" appeared in* The New Yorker *in 1949.*] But the first science fiction stories I did, I used the technique that you guys were using, which was to work around the core of a classic. But then I . . .

GAINES: When you got into the science fiction, you were in a field you could do something with. And you did a few of the great EC science fiction classics like "Henry and his Goon Child," and "Gregory Had a Model T."

KURTZMAN: Bill used to *laugh* over my science fiction!

BENSON: *It's always fascinated me that there were virtually two lines at EC.*

GAINES: I recall when Harvey made the suggestion that he do an adventure book. Now, adventure is something that I never had any feel for. I had a feel for science fiction, of course, and for horror and suspense, but I didn't know what the hell he meant by adventure. I remember the first and only adventure story that Al and I ever wrote, or attempted to write, "Hong Kong Intrigue." It was the most dreadful, horrible, stupid story . . . it was my attempt to plot what I thought Harvey meant by adventure. And I hated it! From then on Harvey handled his books by himself simply because I didn't have the faintest idea what the hell he was getting at.

KURTZMAN: The adventure that I had in mind can best be summed up by recalling the old *Captain Easy* and *Wash Tubbs* strips by Roy Crane, and I'm sure it goes back to John Ford movies. My schtick was always authenticity, adventure stories that went back to some kind of authenticity, and I think that's essentially what it was that I could get excited about and Bill couldn't. And that John Severin could get excited about. It had something to do with history and historical dates and places, and processes. *Moby Dick*—how you flense a whale. I had this vague idea of adventure which greatly excited me, which wasn't on your wavelength at all.

GAINES: Completely apart from me. For two or three years, Harvey's two books did fairly well. They were 70% sellers, where the horror books were 80% sellers.

KURTZMAN: There always seemed to be no parallel between sales and what we were excited about.

GAINES: Our lowest class books were our horror books, and they sold the best. The science fiction and war books were weak sisters commercially. But we always felt they were our finest books.

KURTZMAN: Bill used to have this system for charting sales which I always watched in wonder, but I never quite understood. He'd keep little piles of thumb-nail papers that would fit into the palm of your hand, and he would sit there with a slide rule and he'd make little marks on the papers, and he'd look at his slide rule and make more little marks on his papers. And at any given moment he knew what was selling.

GAINES: As best we could. We were, of course, with the weakest distributor of them all, Leader News. And that EC comics sold as well as they did is especially to our credit, because if the wholesalers had no use for comics, they *certainly* had no use for *Leader News's* comics. And of course the reason for our success was quality. We did it on quality.

KURTZMAN: What always interested me was the fact that the comic book industry always used to look askance at our efforts, specifically Bill's efforts, and I always remember us being the low man on the totem pole. Always the last in the popularity contests amongst the publishers. And what eventually happened is that the whole comic book business turned to our whole approach. After they poo-pooed us for years they then turned into what we were doing.

GAINES: Or did their best to turn into what we were doing. They didn't have the soul. If I sound metaphysical, I'm sorry. You'd be hard pressed to analyse exactly what our stories had that their best stories didn't. But I always felt that the EC books had a certain soul.

KURTZMAN: They didn't have the profound understanding that you *do* have when you start something and have a real reason for starting it.

GAINES: The difference is that we loved what we were

doing. Harvey *loved* his books, and *I* loved the *other* books. Feldstein is a great craftsman, but Feldstein, and he admits this, never had any love for any of it. He did it because he does a job. And he does a good job and a workmanlike job, but he didn't have any *love* for the stuff. He just did it because they sold. Harvey, on the other hand, had a great love for what he was doing, and this love showed through.

And Martin Goodman, when he was imitating us—and at one point I understand he had 70 horror titles . . .

KURTZMAN [*incredulous*]: Seventy?

GAINES: Remember, there were 700 books in those days, so 70 horror titles isn't so much, I guess, if you look at it that way. We had three. We started with three and we ended with three. If something got hot, we didn't put 30 of them out. We didn't work that way. We couldn't have.

BENSON: *What I really want to ask is this—you published these comics because you liked them. Now, in the case of the science fiction and the horror books you were very much*

GOOD GRIEF, STILL *MORE* INTERVIEWS WITH HARVEY KURTZMAN?

There have been about a dozen substantial interviews with Harvey Kurtzman, and many more shorter ones over the years, as the Babbleography below attests. Underground artist Spain did a purely visual one, and John Verpoorten, who at one time was interested in a career in radio, even recorded his own high fidelity Kurtzman interview and had it pressed on an LP record for his collection.

For the full story of the interviews in this issue one must return to the summer of 1972 when (with one exception) Kurtzman interviews had only appeared in publications with a circulation of under 100 copies. At that time I came up with the incredible idea of doing a series of book length *interviews with comic book artists in the manner of Peter Bogdanovich's incomparable conversations with John Ford, Fritz Lang and Allan Dwan for Studio Vista/Praeger paperbacks. I discussed the subject with Kurtzman and asked him to be the subject of the first book. He agreed and came up with the excellent concept of recording each chapter with a different person associated with his career, which we proceeded to do over the next four years. During that period, Harvey began to fulfill his destiny of being the most interviewed comics artist. As each of these other interviews appeared, it added fuel to my proclivity for procrastination. The more I delayed, the more Harvey felt he shouldn't turn down interviews just because of a book that might never come out. This spiral has brought us to the present point, where it seems necessary to write this ridiculously long explanation just to justify running portions of the book in* Squa Tront.

We had planned to have five chapters in our book. The first was with Gil Kane, *who worked with Kurtzman in the very earliest days of his career. The resulting four-and-a-half hour conversation has so far defied all efforts to shape it into a readable interview, but parts of it are fascinating and we haven't given up. The second, with* Bill Gaines, *appears in this issue. It was the first time that Gaines and Kurtzman had spoken more than briefly since their lawsuit years before. Many of the comments and anecdotes that I heard for the first time during this interview they have since told for publication elsewhere. To avoid duplication I have cut heavily, although it was necessary to leave in some repetitive material in abbreviated form to preserve continuity. The third interview was with* Harry Chester, *and the fourth interview was with* Arnold Roth *and* Al Jaffee, *which, as you may expect, made for a very entertaining evening. The final interview, also appearing in this issue, was with* Will Elder. *The points covered in this extremely interesting discussion with Kurtzman's rarely interviewed partner have not been duplicated by later interviews, and it appears here in its virtual entirety.*

I fully intend to publish the other three interviews somehow, somewhere. So watch for them—and collect 'em all! *—John Benson*

A HARVEY KURTZMAN BABBLEOGRAPHY

The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom, # 335, Apr. 18, 1980 (DynaPubs Enterprises). "Shel Dorf and the Fantasy Makers: Harvey Kurtzman." 4½ tabloid pgs. General fannish interview, illustrated.

CANAR (Comic Art News and Reviews), Vol. 3, # 1 (Whole # 25) Sep. 1974 (Balge). "Harvey Kurtzman Interview" by Dave Sim. 2 pgs. General interview. "Kurtzman Speaks" 1 pg. Transcript of talk given by Kurtzman in Oct. 1974 at Fancon, York University.

Cartoonist PROfiles, # 26, Jun. 1975 (Cartoonist PROfiles, Inc.). "H. Kurtzman" by Judd Hurd. 4 pgs. Kurtzman talks about teaching at the School of Visual Arts, reality vs. fantasy, and gives a quick runthrough of his career. Includes photos, and two full-page "Hey Look" reprints. (Indicates "to be continued," but never was.)

Comedy, # 1, Summer 1980 (Trite Expectations, Inc.). "Harvey Kurtzman." Accompanying a feature article on *Help* by Larry Hama, this two column interview is exclusively about *Help* and Warren.

The Comics Journal, # 67, Oct. 1981 (Fantagraphics, Inc.). "An Interview with the Man Who Brought Truth to the Comics: Harvey Kurtzman" by Kim Thompson and Gary Groth. 24 pgs. Profusely illustrated in-depth interview covering all aspects of Kurtzman's career. One of the best.

Crimmer's, (not numbered, but third issue), Spr. 1976 (Crimmer's/Durwood). "Harvey Kurtzman Interview" by T. Durwood. 8 pgs. Focuses on the esthetics of EC, satire. Illustrated.

EC Lives! 1972 EC Fan Addict Convention, 1972 (Barlow/Hershenson). For the convention program book the comments of various former EC staff members about their cohorts were recorded and transcribed. Kurtzman offered comments about most of the EC staffers.

Frontline Combat, scheduled for 1982 publication (Cochran). The three volumes of this complete boxed set contain Kurtzman's comments on each issue of this title, recorded by John Benson.

A History of Underground Comics, 1974 (Straight Arrow Books) by Mark James Estren. Brief interview on pg. 67 about S. Clay Wilson. Extended excerpts of Alternate Media Conference transcripts (undergrounds, ethical problems, etc.) on pgs. 294-300. Other miscellaneous Kurtzman quotes throughout the book.

Image, # 1, Spr. 1960 (Benson). "Another Visit with Harvey Kurtzman" by John Benson and Larry Ivie. 8 (5½x8½) pgs. Comments on his work at the time, and a bit about EC. (Constructed from notes, not taped.)

Image, # 2, Jan. 1961 (Benson). "On the Previous Visit" by John Benson. ½ pg. Comments on *Help*. (Constructed from notes, not taped.)

Image, # 5, Winter 1962 (Benson). "Comic Art and The Spirit as Seen by H. Kurtzman" by John Benson. 4 pgs. Discussion of Eisner, early comics in general, and *Mad*. (Constructed from notes, not taped.)

Inside Comics, # 2, Summer 1974 (Galaxy News Service, Inc.). "Conversations with the Brother-in-Law of Underground Comix" by Jeffrey H. Wasserman. 7 1/3 pgs. Covers Kurtzman's career to that date, starting with EC. Illustrated.

Newcon '76 Program Book (Phelps). "Harvey Kurtzman" by E.B. Boatner. 5 pgs. This article on Kurtzman's career makes use of extended quotes obtained from Kurtzman by the author. With photos.

Nugada, Vol. 2 # 2, cover dated May (Apr. on contents page. No year given; probably 1959 or 1960.) (Hochstein). "Hello Harvey Kurtzman" by Sig Case and Gary Delain. 1 pg. Reprint from *Shag* # 1.

Punk, # 3, Apr. 1976 (Punk Publications, Inc.). "R. Crumb Interview." 3 pgs. Partial transcription of interview of Crumb by Kurtzman before an audience at the School of Visual Arts on Mar. 12, 1976. The discussion is about Crumb, but Kurtzman's questions reveal something of himself.

Punk, # 4, Jul. 1976 (# 3, Apr. 1976 in indicia, erroneously) (Punk Publications, Inc.). "Harvey Kurtzman Interview" by J. Holmstrom. 6 pgs. Kurtzman talks about EC, Gloria Steinem and rock music. Illustrated and creatively hand lettered.

RBCC (Rocket's Blast/Comic Collector), # 47, Sept. 1966 (SFCA/Love). "An Interview with Harvey Kurtzman" by Alan Hewetson. 1 pg. Reprinted from *Voice of Comicdom* # 5.

Rogue, Vol. 10, # 6, Dec. 1965 (Greenleaf Publishing Co.). "Hey Look! An Interview with Harvey Kurtzman" by J.P.C. James. 8½ pgs. Concentrates on Kurtzman's humor work, but covers whole career. With photos.

Shag, # 1, Feb. 1959 (Case/Delain). "Phone Colume [*sic*]: Hello, Harvey Kurtzman" by Sig Case and Gary Delain. 1 pg. Comments on fans, Ikie and Mikie, *Humbug*, working in TV.

Smudge, # 3, May 1962 (Pilati). "Afterthoughts on a Man and a Program" by Joe Pilati. 3½ pgs. Reportage of a radio interview with Kurtzman on New York station WRVR on March 23, 1962, with many quotes, mostly about his satire magazines.

Spoof, # 3, Apr. 1958 (Brown). "A Bit of an Interview" by Marty Schneider. 2 pgs. Comments on *Humbug*, *Trump*, the new *Mad*.

Spoof, # 4, Aug. 1958 (Brown). "A Visit with H. Kurtzman" by John Benson and Larry Ivie. 3 pgs. Comments on *Humbug*, working in TV, the new *Mad*. (Constructed from notes, not taped.)

Squa Tront, # 8, 1978 (Benson). "The Transcripts: 1972 EC Convention: The War Panel" 6 pp. The panel included five other staff members of EC's war comics, but Kurtzman fielded most of the questions. With photos.

Squatront, # 2, Fall 1959 (Britt). "David Kravitz Calling H. Kurtzman" 1 pg. News of *Jungle Book* and other current projects.

A Talk with Harvey Kurtzman, 1966 (Benson) by John Benson. 24 pgs. Covers all aspects of Kurtzman's career to that date.

Two-Fisted Tales, 1980 (Cochran). The four volumes of this complete boxed set contain many comments by Kurtzman recorded by E.B. Boatner and John Benson especially for the volumes, as well as quotes from previously published sources.

US: The Paperback Magazine, # 3, May 1970 (Bantam Books). "An Interview with Harvey Kurtzman" by Spain. Strictly a visual "interview" of six panels, one per page, accompanying an article on Kurtzman by D.A. Latimer.

Voice of Comicdom, # 5, Aug. 1965 (Arbunich). "An Interview with Harvey Kurtzman" by Alan Hewetson. 1 pg. Comments on early days, favorite artists, leaving *Mad*, etc. (This was actually a loose-leaf flyer inserted in the above issue, and also distributed separately.)

Will Eisner's The Spirit, # 31, Oct. 1981 (Kitchen Sink). "Shop Talk 2: Harvey Kurtzman" by Will Eisner. 7 pp. Eisner and Kurtzman discuss comics techniques; Kurtzman describes the mechanics of producing "Little Annie Fanny." Illustrated.

Wonderworld, Vol. 3, # 2 (Whole # 10), Nov. 1973 (Kyle). "Between the Panels: The EC Convention, Continued" by John Benson. 1 pg. Excerpts from the War Panel which later appeared in its entirety in *Squa Tront* # 8.

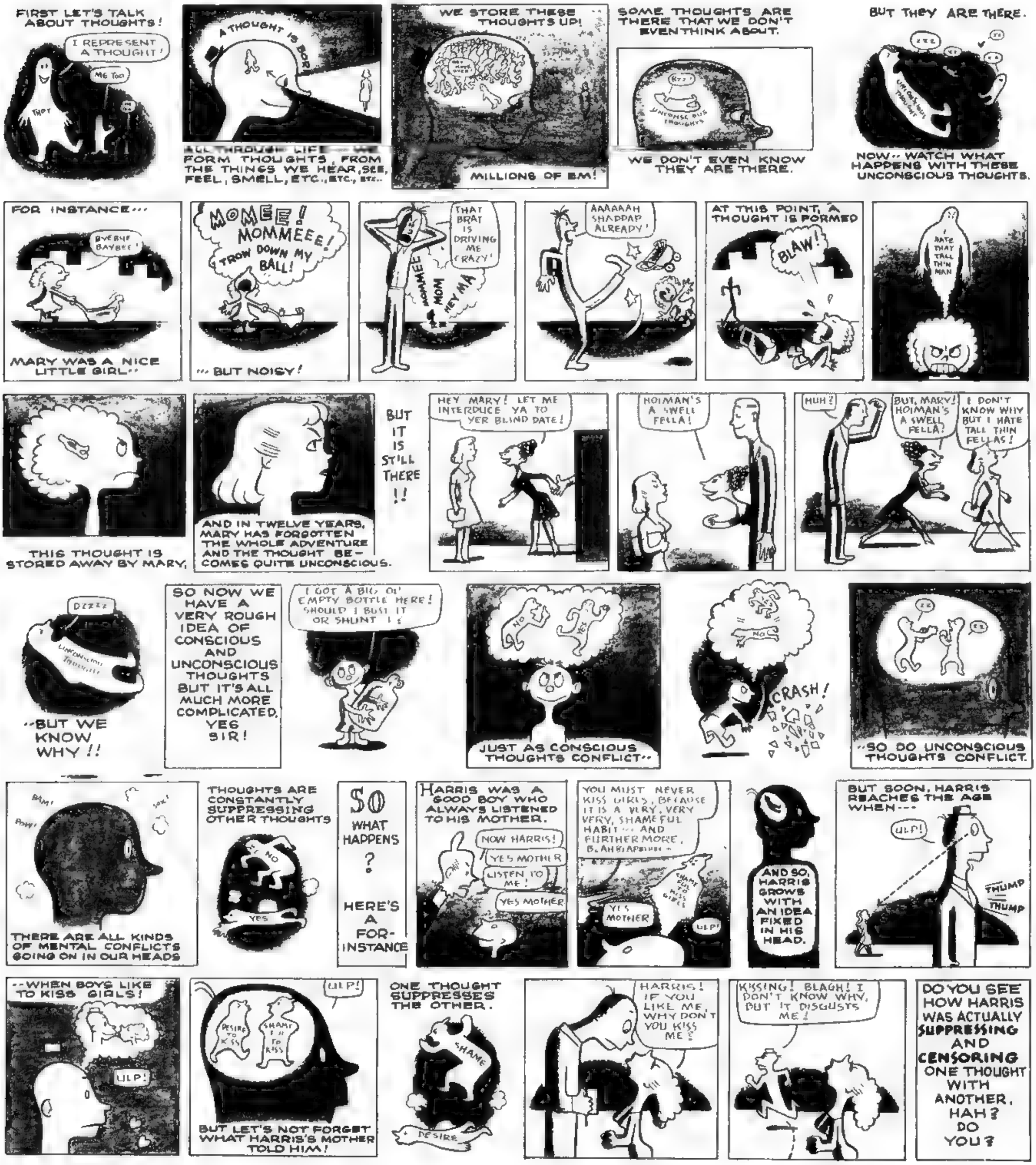
involved in the creation of them.

GAINES: Yes. Al and I together would work out the plot, and Al would write the story. I would have been happy to help Harvey like I helped Al, but I couldn't because I never understood what he was doing.

BENSON: *So the question is, why did you hand over the reins to Harvey and continue to publish his books, which you had nothing to do with, even when they began to lose money?*

KURTZMAN: He was sick!

GAINES: I always thought of the business as a single entity. It wasn't split up in my mind. We really published for ourselves [*laughs*]. When you get right down to it, that's what we were doing. I was *playing* at publisher, you know; it was like a game, and we published what we liked. Just because something started losing money was no reason to drop it, if we liked it. And although I had no *feeling* for what Harvey was doing, I *loved* what Harvey was doing. Don't misunderstand me! I couldn't help him, but I recognized that what he was


FIRST LET'S TALK ABOUT THOUGHTS!
I REPRESENT A THOUGHT!
ME TOO!
THOT
A THOUGHT IS BORN!
ALL THROUGH LIFE WE FORM THOUGHTS, FROM THE THINGS WE HEAR, SEE, FEEL, SMELL, ETC., ETC., ETC..
WE STORE THESE THOUGHTS UP!
MILLIONS OF 'EM!
SOME THOUGHTS ARE THERE THAT WE DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT.
WE DON'T EVEN KNOW THEY ARE THERE.
BUT THEY ARE THERE.
UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHT
NOW.. WATCH WHAT HAPPENS WITH THESE UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS.
FOR INSTANCE...
BYE BYE BAYBEE!
MARY WAS A NICE LITTLE GIRL..
MOMEE! MOMMEEE! TROW DOWN MY BALL!
..BUT NOISY!
MOMMEE MOM HEY MA
THAT BRAT IS DRIVING ME CRAZY!
AAAAAAH SHADDAP ALREADY!
AT THIS POINT, A THOUGHT IS FORMED
BLAW!
I HATE THAT TALL THIN MAN
THIS THOUGHT IS STORED AWAY BY MARY,
AND IN TWELVE YEARS, MARY HAS FORGOTTEN THE WHOLE ADVENTURE AND THE THOUGHT BECOMES QUITE UNCONSCIOUS.
BUT IT IS STILL THERE!!
HEY MARY! LET ME INTERDUCE YA TO YER BLIND DATE!
HOIMAN'S A SWELL FELLA!
HUH?
BUT, MARY! HOIMAN'S A SWELL FELLA!
I DON'T KNOW WHY BUT I HATE TALL THIN FELLAS!
DIZZZ
UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS
..BUT WE KNOW WHY!!
SO NOW WE HAVE A VERY ROUGH IDEA OF CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS BUT IT'S ALL MUCH MORE COMPLICATED, YES SIR!
I GOT A BIG OL' EMPTY BOTTLE HERE! SHOULD I BUST IT OR SHUNT IT
NO
YES
JUST AS CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS CONFLICT..
CRASH!
..SO DO UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS CONFLICT.
BAM!
POW!
SOK!
THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF MENTAL CONFLICTS GOING ON IN OUR HEADS
THOUGHTS ARE CONSTANTLY SUPPRESSING OTHER THOUGHTS
NO
YES
SO
WHAT HAPPENS
?
HERE'S A FOR-INSTANCE
HARRIS WAS A GOOD BOY WHO ALWAYS LISTENED TO HIS MOTHER.
NOW HARRIS!
YES MOTHER
LISTEN TO ME!
YES MOTHER
YOU MUST NEVER KISS GIRLS, BECAUSE IT IS A VERY, VERY VERY, SHAMEFUL HABIT -- AND FURTHER MORE, B-AH BLAPHUH -
SHAME TO KISS GIRLS
YES MOTHER
ULP!
AND SO, HARRIS GROWS WITH AN IDEA FIXED IN HIS HEAD.
BUT SOON, HARRIS REACHES THE AGE WHEN---
ULP!
THUMP
THUMP
--WHEN BOYS LIKE TO KISS GIRLS!
ULP!
DESIRE TO KISS
SHAME TO KISS
ULP!
BUT LET'S NOT FORGET WHAT HARRIS'S MOTHER TOLD HIM!
ONE THOUGHT SUPPRESSES THE OTHER.
SHAME
DESIRE
HARRIS! IF YOU LIKE ME, WHY DON'T YOU KISS ME?
KISSING! BLAGH! I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT IT DISGUSTS ME!
DO YOU SEE HOW HARRIS WAS ACTUALLY SUPPRESSING AND CENSORING ONE THOUGHT WITH ANOTHER, HAH? DO YOU?

doing was fantastically good. And although his war books never made big money, they held their own until the war was over. Then they slipped badly, but fortunately *Mad* came along to fill the gap and keep Harvey busy.

KURTZMAN: The way I've always regarded it, Bill has always had a very strong intellectual understanding of democratic processes. Up to a certain point; then he turns into a monster. You know, nobody intellectualized, but he just understood that people had the right to do certain things.

GAINES: The business was making a profit, the horror books were carrying it, and I was perfectly content to keep the other titles there. I've never had the feeling that you have to make more money this year than you made last year, which is the corporate mentality. These big conglomerates don't know from nothing except every year you have to do better than last year. If you don't there's something wrong. And this is absurd. *Why* do you have to do better than last year? As long as EC was making money we were OK.

KURTZMAN: I must admit that Bill's tolerance of my own independent train of direction—the fact that while he didn't feel for it that much, he respected my independence to do that, to do my own craziness—that was rare.

GAINES: The real difference between Harvey's and Al's books is that Al and I, despite the fact that Al was an artist, were story oriented, and even word oriented. Feldstein developed a Ray Bradbury-ish style of using words. He got all carried away with the words, and so did I. I loved Al's words. And we got to the point where the art was really quite secondary. We were using first rate artists, because, why not use first rate artists, they can only enhance what we're doing. But Al would write such heavy captions, and such heavy balloons on occasion, there really was no room for the artist to work. This was not a proper use of the comics form. In retrospect, Harvey was really using the comics format in the way it should be used. When Harvey conceived a story, he conceived it pictorially. That's why to him the lettering was part of the picture, and he insisted on hand lettering. To Al and me the lettering was nothing, it could have been typography. What the hell, we were working with *words*.

KURTZMAN: I don't agree that there is a *way* for comics to be, because I find in life that there are readers who are verbal and readers who are visual. Of course, it's not 100% either way. But you can enjoy verbal if you are a verbal person.

GAINES: No, but Harvey, what I'm getting at is that comics by their very nature are a visual art form. You don't need the comic pictures to be verbal. We were trying to pack so much into a seven page story that we insisted on seven panels to the page, minimum, and then we put a lot of words in, and it was really not making full use of the comic technique. We could have done almost as well in a pulp, except that we were in the comic business, not the pulp business. Harvey was doing something which I think was more to the point. He was making comics—why, he had pages where nobody said anything, and that's using comics to their ultimate. We would never dream of that—we couldn't waste the space.

Where we really carried this to an extreme was in our 3-D books. Now our 3-D books were technically fine. Our ink was lousy, but that was something over which we had no control. But where Kubert at St. John and the rest of them were making full-page spreads and half-page spreads and making use of the space to get this beautiful 3-D effect, we were still putting seven little panels to the page, only they were 3-D panels. And they were just as heavy with lettering as in the 2-D books. If I had it to do over again . . . I'd probably do it the same way, but I'd still be wrong.

BENSON: *The ultimate in that, not to get too far off, was Picto-Fiction, where there were whole panels of text.*

GAINES: Well, Picto-Fiction was just an attempt to duck the code.

KURTZMAN: It was, again, an attempt to say, "We're not doing comic books any more."

GAINES: We deliberately switched to typography. We tried to make it as unlike a comic as possible and still be a comic. But what made Picto-Fiction deadly was that there were no balloons, and everything was blocks of typography. It was the ultimate in the direction that we were going, but we really didn't do it out of choice. There is a law on the books of the State of New York against horror comics.

KURTZMAN: I didn't know that.

GAINES: And it's still there. I don't think it's constitutional, but it's never been tested. And I wasn't about to go to jail to test the damn thing.

BENSON: *Why did so many editors of comics do the covers of their comics?*

KURTZMAN: It's the plum.

GAINES: I didn't know it was common.

BENSON: *Well, aside from Harvey and Al, there was Lenny Cole.*

KURTZMAN: With Lenny Cole it was the plum.

GAINES: I think in some cases it's simply because they could do it better. And if you're an editor who's an ex-artist and who wants to keep his hand in, what better way than the cover? I mean, it's one thing. You do a story and it's 35 things.

KURTZMAN: It's the plum!

BENSON: *Can you describe the daily routine at EC?*

GAINES: As you pointed out, it was really like two divisions. And, of course, as time went on the two divisions became even more divided. I could tell you all about the routine that Al and I followed, but it wouldn't have much bearing on what Harvey did.

KURTZMAN: This is really a fascinating evening. This is probably heading for the big crisis. We'll probably fight it out here and now.

GAINES: I don't remember exactly, but for large gobs of time Harvey would work at home. He used to work in his attic.

KURTZMAN: Golly, that sounds familiar. You know, I'm still in the attic. Did I work in the attic when we were in that apartment on 116th Street? I know I didn't work in the attic then. I think I was pretty invisible to everybody in the sense that I did work home.

ADELE KURTZMAN: Remember when you worked in the hospital that time you had hepatitis?

GAINES: Jerry De Fuccio is the guy to interview, he has so many funny stories about the missions that Harvey would send him on, because Harvey had to have everything 100% accurate.

KURTZMAN: "Jerry, go see what death feels like."

GAINES: That's about the only thing you didn't send him out to do, although the time you sent him down on the submarine he thought he was going to get killed.

BENSON: *You developed a star system for the EC artists.*

GAINES: Yeah. We ran their biographies.

BENSON: *That was a new idea for comics. Where did you come up with it?*

GAINES: I don't know. It seemed perfectly logical. And I don't think we started out to do it deliberately, but when the mail came in the way it did, I guess we realized that the way to whip up enthusiasm among the readers was to keep discussing the different artists, and the different stories, and taking votes on what story they liked best in each issue and then publishing the results. But what we did was dishonest, of course, because we never admitted that the artists weren't writing their own stories, and that Feldstein wrote them all, except for what Craig wrote. Of course, where Al wrote a story in three hours, Johnny wrote it in a week.

KURTZMAN: And I wrote it in three weeks.

GAINES: Johnny was slower than you, I think. For awhile Johnny was doing nothing but writing and drawing one eight-pager a month. If you think about that, it's pretty incredible. I always had a theory that John had some kind of computer working in his head that he wasn't even aware of, that prevented him from making more than X dollars a year. As the rates went up, his production went down.

Stan Lee gave Kurtzman a remarkably free hand in doing Hey Look, *but occasionally Kurtzman "went too far." In one page Kurtzman repeated the* Hey Look *logo ten times; in the last panel the short character explains that his partner had a sudden attack of stage fright. Glen Bray's* Illustrated Harvey Kurtzman Index *erroneously describes that one as done especially for the 1966* Talk with Harvey Kurtzman*—but if you look closely at John Severin's drawing of the Charles William Harvey Studio (elsewhere in this issue) you'll see that strip pinned to the wall above Kurtzman's drawing board.*

Stan Lee apparently found the photographic background of the strip shown here too daring (perhaps he felt it wouldn't reproduce). At any rate, we haven't found it printed in any comic—if you know otherwise, let us know!

HEY LOOK!

IT'S CHILLY!

I'D BUY A COAT IF I HAD ENOUGH MONEY--BUT I DON'T, SO I CAN'T!

SACRE BLEU! NOM DU CHIEN! WHY DIDN'T I THINK"

FOR A NICE COAT--GET GISMO PAINT

$2.00 PER GAL

I'LL BUY A CHEAP CAN OF PAINT, AND THEN I CAN **PAINT** ON A COAT! MAYBE TWO COATS! MAYBE THREE!

HA! THIS WHOLE CAN OF YELLOW OCHRE ENAMEL PAINT COST ME TWO DOLLARS! I THINK I'LL PUT ON TWO COATS!

HWHOO! NOW IT'S WARM OUT!

I THINK I'LL TAKE OFF ONE COAT!

UH OH!

THESE COATS DON'T COME OFF!

I KNOW..

--I'LL TAKE THEM OFF WITH TURPENTINE!

OOW

IT BURNS!

HEY! IT'S CHILLY! AREN'T YOU GOING TO GET A COAT?

I DON'T NEED ONE NOW! THESE BANDAGES KEEP ME WARM!

end

BENSON: *Why is it that you signed your humor work, but never your war work?*

KURTZMAN: I have a terrible admission. I was always ashamed of being a comic book artist, at the beginning.

ADELE KURTZMAN: [*gasps*].

KURTZMAN: I never told this to Adele.

BENSON: *You signed your humor work before EC, and as soon as* Mad *started, you signed the covers. But you never signed the war material in between.*

KURTZMAN: I signed what I thought was good. But I was . . . a terrible hypocrite in a sense.

ADELE KURTZMAN: A pompous ass.

KURTZMAN: A pompous ass.

GAINES: Remember that Harvey's signature was a comic signature. I don't know whether this had anything to do with it, but it might have looked strange on a war comic which he was doing with complete seriousness. To sign it with the little stick figure, maybe he figured, subconsciously or otherwise, that it wouldn't be proper.

KURTZMAN: If I had it to do all over again today I would have signed them. But I had a terrible inferiority complex about everything I did. I used to go around with *Mad* magazine hidden. A guy would ask me, "What do you do for a living?" "Ummwelll . . ."

BENSON: *On the war comics, were there any conflicts?*

KURTZMAN: Yeah, in Korea there was a gigantic conflict . . . There were no conflicts.

GAINES: Harvey and I had a lot of financial conflicts, which came about because Al was turning out seven books while Harvey was turning out two. And since I paid piecework, so much per page, so much a cover, and so much per book for editing, Al was making three and a half times as much as Harvey was.

KURTZMAN: And I wanted it all!

GAINES: Well, Harvey felt that he was doing a better job than Al, which he was, you know, intrinsically. On the other hand I kept pointing out that Al's books were selling better than his, which they were. So it was kind of a stand-off, and I think it's interesting that the real reason that *Mad* was born was my brilliant idea of increasing Harvey's income by 50% simply by having him put out a third book which he would squeeze in between the two bi-monthly war books. Because I thought it would only take him a week to turn out a humor book.

BENSON: *Did you expect much from* Mad*?*

GAINES: No.

KURTZMAN: No, not really.

BENSON: *When did you first feel it was going to be a big success?*

KURTZMAN: I guess Bill's slide rule was the first indication. For me it was the mail.

GAINES: The first three issues lost money, but then the fourth made it, and from then on it just took off. But I don't think there was the kind of excitement over the comic book that there was later on when Harvey put out issue # 24, the first 25¢ book. That made such a splash that we actually went back to press. It wasn't a good idea to go back to press, but the very fact that we did it indicates how well the book did. It was a relatively small print order; I think it was about 400,000. And the book was so successful, and sold so fast—even through Leader News [*laughs*]—that they urged us to go back to press with about another 50,000. Of course, by the time we got the second run out the next issue was practically out. You should never go back to press on a magazine unless it's a semi-annual or something, because you really don't have time. But we did it.

KURTZMAN: I forgot all about that—you're bringing back memories.

BENSON: *For me, the realization that* Mad *was a phenomenon came with the* Pageant *article. How did that article come about?*

KURTZMAN: There was a guy by the name of Harris Shevelson.

GAINES: He died in that plane crash, didn't he?

KURTZMAN: Right. He was a very unusual editor of the times. He decided to have an article about us in *Pageant.* And we were very impressed. He sent Harold Hayes over to do the article, and of course that led to a whole chain of events, which very much involved the slick *Mad.*

GAINES: Somewhere along the line Harvey, who, as you now know, was ashamed of doing comics, broached the idea to me of turning *Mad* into something other than a comic. I didn't know exactly what he was talking about, and probably Harvey didn't then know exactly what he was talking about either. But he wanted to get out of the ten cent comic field, which was a good idea anyway. And I was having none of it because I was a comic publisher. I didn't want to be anything else but a comic publisher, and I said, "No." Some time later, as a result of the *Pageant* article, I suppose, Harvey got an offer from Shevelson to come to *Pageant* and edit a section of the magazine.

KURTZMAN: As I remember he wanted me to be his assistant.

GAINES: I remember it more specifically than that. I think he wanted you to take over a whole section of *Pageant* and do your thing with it.

KURTZMAN: Possibly.

GAINES: One way or another, he made Harvey an attractive offer, financially.

KURTZMAN: I don't believe he made me a money offer.

GAINES: I think he did, yeah, because I can even tell you what it was. He offered you twelve grand.

ADELE KURTZMAN: Two hundred a week.

GAINES: No, it was more than two hundred a week. He offered him twelve grand. I have a pretty good memory for these things [*laughs*].

ADELE KURTZMAN: But I remember it was money, that I do remember.

GAINES: Now I didn't feel I could match that. I don't know what I was paying in those days, but I was probably up to five hundred an issue for editing, the cover was probably sixty, and the script was maybe ten bucks a page. So Harvey was getting something in the neighborhood of eight hundred dollars an issue. And twelve issues times eight was nowhere

Some have mistaken Silver Linings *for a daily strip because of its format, but it was a Sunday, syndicated by the New York* Herald-Tribune*, designed to fill in between a half- and a third-page strip. Being a filler, there were weeks when it was absent from the* Trib*; being syndicated however, the missing strips probably appeared* somewhere*—go to it, you collectors!*

near twelve thousand dollars. So, remembering that Harvey had broached this idea, I countered Shevelson's offer with ten thousand dollars, but offered to let Harvey change *Mad* into a slick. And Harvey accepted.

KURTZMAN: We were also at the crossroads, though. The comic *Mad* was in trouble. There was the pressure of the Comic Code.

GAINES: True. But that really was not why I did it. Because I intended to go right on publishing my other comics without joining the Code, and, if you recall, I did. It was disastrous, but I did it.

BENSON: *Could you rehash the old story of your autobiography in* Mad *# 5?*

GAINES: That came about when Harvey was sick, and we had to fill up the page with something. And we thought it would be a funny lark to surprise Harvey [*laughs heartily*] with this biography of me.

ADELE KURTZMAN: I don't remember that.

KURTZMAN: Don't you remember the time I wanted to kill?

GAINES [*laughs heartily*]: And of course with characteristic bad taste we offended Harvey, and also offended half the rest of the world, notably a lot of wholesalers. What we were doing with that thing was—well, we were doing a lot of things. We were trying to be funny . . .

KURTZMAN: They were trying to play a little tricky.

GAINES: We were trying to amuse Harvey in the hospital . . .

KURTZMAN: They were trying to drive me over the edge.

GAINES: And at the same time we were taking cracks at some of the sanctimonious comic publishers, who shall be nameless, who actually got their original money and start in the business by publishing near-pornography. And I used myself as an example of a typical comic book publisher who got his start by doing these things. But it was true! There were comic publishers who got their start that way. Well, it turns out these "old boy" comic publishers were beloved by the "old boy" wholesalers. And this thing infuriated the wholesalers, who saw through what I was doing.

BENSON: *Did they really catch that point?*

GAINES: Oh, yes! Because they knew the beginnings, and they were very offended. Now, they were also offended by other things which we were completely innocent of. My favorite example of this is in "Outer Sanctum" . . .

BENSON: *That's in the same issue.*

GAINES: Yes. But that was Harvey's work, not mine. Or, really it was Bill Elder's work, because when Elder illustrated it he put a little sign, on page one, "Nice Fat Errand Boy Wanted." Eh? Now you and I know what the nice fat errand boy was wanted for. He was wanted to be eaten. But not the wholesalers! *They* knew he was wanted for *sexual perversion.* That's what we had to deal with, oh yes.

BENSON: *Did they really think that, or were they just trying to* use *it . . .*

GAINES: No, no, they really believed it. What do wholesalers know about ghouls?

KURTZMAN: But they know what nice fat errand boys are for.

ADELE KURTZMAN: Oh, that's wild.

GAINES: This is the kind of misunderstandings that were going on. And it all came at once. Of course, they were mad at us for the horror books in the first place. Also, unfortunately, there was a convention of the bastards in New York at that particular moment.

KURTZMAN: A rough bunch of guys.

GAINES: Many of them were ignorant, uneducated, mean, and rotten. And they were tough, especially in those days. These days, they're college educated, second and third generation. But then, they had the typical hard-hat mentality of the day, and they were offended by these things. So we had a bit of a crisis there. I remember being gotten out of bed on a Saturday or Sunday morning by the distributor, and routing Harvey and Feldstein out, and the whole bunch of us came into the office and we dreamed up that apology to the wholesalers. And you did the beautiful cover where we were all clasping our hands begging forgiveness. Remember?

KURTZMAN: Vaguely.

BENSON: *Was there a story behind all the signs saying "This is a lampoon" in "Batboy and Rubin,"* Mad *# 8?*

GAINES: That was because of the "Superduperman" lawsuit.

BENSON: *Is there a story there, or is it nothing more than that they sent you a letter from a lawyer?*

GAINES: That's really all there was to it, a letter from a lawyer, but it evolved into an interesting story. National Comics threatened to sue for "Superduperman." And at that time my attorney, Dave Alterbaum, who recently died, was unfortunately also their attorney [*much laughter*].

KURTZMAN: Wasn't exactly what you'd call a fighting attorney.

GAINES: So he said, "Bill, you can't do that." And I said, "Well, OK, I can see their point." I mean after all, we stole their comic hero and we tore him to pieces, and they don't like it. "OK." Harvey was the one who said, "This is ridiculous. I think we should be able to do it." And he insisted that we get another opinion. In fact Harvey had found a book by an attorney, and in the book the attorney said, "You can do this kind of thing. No problem." And Harvey shows me this. So Dave Alterbaum, Harvey and I go to this attorney that wrote the book, and we say, "Here is our specific case."

KURTZMAN: Didn't he charge us like ten million dollars for stepping into the office and breathing the air?

GAINES: Just about. It wasn't ten million, it was five hundred, but in those days that was a lot of money. And we come up there and we say, "You've very general in your book. Let's be specific. Can we or can't we do 'Superduperman'?" And the guy says, "Well, I'll have to write a whole thing." [*Much laughter.*] I pay him the five hundred dollars, he writes

SO WHO'RE THEY PICKING TO WIN THE PENNANT OUT IN YOUR HOME TOWN OF BROOKLYN
COUGH COUGH COUGH
ARE YOU KIDDING?
WELL FELLAS·COUGH-!! I'VE GOT TO "COUGH" GO MEET·COUGH·MY·"HAK"·GIRL "COUGH·HAK!
DECIEVER! YOU'VE BEEN SMOKING! I CAN STILL SEE WISPS OF SMOKE COMING OUT OF YOUR NOSE! I HATE YOU!
YOU CAN'T WIN!
HAK
COUGH COUGH

a whole thing that says, "No, you can't do 'Superduperman.' " [*More laughter.*] Really. Well, at this point Lyle Stuart comes into the story. Lyle Stuart had this friend, Marty Scheiman, who was his attorney. And Lyle Stuart says, "This is ridiculous, why don't you go to another attorney?" And I said, "All right," so he took me up to meet Marty. Marty listened to the whole story, and he said, "I don't think there's any law on this. I don't think anybody knows whether you can do it or not do it, but I would tell them to go to hell." Unfortunately, I had already kind of promised not to do "Superduperman" any more on the basis of the opinions of the first two attorneys. But because of Marty and the strength of Marty's conviction that there really was no reason why we shouldn't do this kind of thing if we wanted to, we then just proceeded to do it, and we've just been doing it ever since. But the first hero was Harvey for saying, "Wait a minute, why listen to Dave Alterbaum?" And the second hero was Marty.

ADELE KURTZMAN: Nothing like that had been done before?

KURTZMAN: I think there had been college magazine situations, but I don't think there had been a court contest.

Someday you'll have to explain to me why Archie Comics sued me [*for "Goodman Goes Playboy" in* Help *# 13*] and not you [*for "Starchie" in* Mad *# 12*].

GAINES: Did you settle out of court?

KURTZMAN: Yeah, settled.

GAINES: It's never been really tested in court by anybody, which may be just as well. I personally have a code of ethics about this kind of thing. I think it's perfectly proper to do something once, or every once in a while. You know, I do *Peanuts* maybe every two years. But to do something as a regular feature, as you were doing with Archie . . .

KURTZMAN: No, no, we didn't . . .

GAINES: I thought it was a regular feature.

KURTZMAN: Once.

GAINES: Once? You did it once? Just once?

KURTZMAN: Because my feeling is the same. You know, when you're making a profit off somebody's product as a result of using their product, as opposed to commenting on the product. And if you do it more than once you're using it, you're not commenting on it.

GAINES: Just talking in general, another thing I try never to do is go into other fields. We did an article a long time ago called "Misery Is . . .", a thing on Charlie Schulz's *Happiness Is . . .* So one of the guys said, "Why don't we put out a book called *Misery Is . . .* And I said, "No, now you're getting too close." See, there was a book *Happiness Is . . .* and all we did was a little article on it. If somebody does a movie, we do an article on the movie. But to actually come out and do a movie making fun of *The Godfather*, a three hour movie, is a different thing. I would hate to have to defend *that* in court. As a matter of fact, when Jack Benny did it, he lost. Jack Benny took *Gaslight* and made it into a rather lengthy, I think it was a one hour television show following the plot line.

KURTZMAN: I think the reason why he lost was that they claimed that he had revealed the plot in advance of the . . .

GAINES: It was more than that, Harvey. Because we reveal plots all the time. He made an entertaining thing using the actual plot in a very similar medium. That's my understanding of why he lost. I don't know. Maybe Goldwater picked on you because he figured he could bluff you out. And maybe he did.

KURTZMAN: We just couldn't afford to go to court.

GAINES: Well, that's it. If you'd gone to court he might have lost.

KURTZMAN: I just thought that was a terrible thing that he did.

GAINES: You know, he had *Archie's Madhouse*, and I let him get away with that. But then he came out with *Archie's Madhouse* featuring the Madhouse Maads. On the first cover of this book there must have been the word "Mad" and the word "Maad" fourteen times. And we sued them and pursued it very vigorously, and he finally dropped the whole thing and agreed not to do it any more. Goldwater and I had a lot of clashes in the old days. I haven't seen him in 15 or 20 years. We've exchanged one or two friendly phone calls. I send his kids *Mad*, he sends my kids *Archies*.

BENSON: *His kids get the better of that deal.*

GAINES: My kids don't think so.

BENSON: *The eleventh issue of* Mad *featured the Wolverton* Life *cover parody. Was that a momentous decision, to go to that kind of disguise?*

KURTZMAN: Well, I don't know how Bill felt . . .

GAINES: I guess we felt sure enough of our audience. But that one got us into trouble too—with *Life*. And there I did have to send a letter promising not to do it again. They nailed us, if you remember, Harvey, because you used a real copy of *Life* in your inside ad: "Beware of imitations." I don't think they could have done anything on the outside cover alone, but the whole thing tied in so much with *Life* that Marty didn't think it was prudent to test it. Remember, this is an untested theory, and it's best not to test it, maybe. So Marty on occasion would bend a little and say, "You're probably right, and maybe we'd win, but why try? Who's going to do another parody of *Life* anyway?" As a matter of fact, we did do another one, and we just ignored the fact that we had agreed not to, and they didn't care. I'm sure it wasn't a factor in their going out of business.

BENSON: *The next cover was even more of a non-comic; a high-class* Atlantic *style cover that just listed the contents in conservative black and white text. That was obviously done before the returns on the eleventh issue had come in. Didn't you get just a little worried about that cover affecting sales?*

KURTZMAN: It was Bill's money. I didn't tend to worry as much.

GAINES: We didn't worry about that kind of thing, because I still say that the philosophy of the outfit was to do what we liked, and as long as it fit certain compulsive frameworks which I had, which drove Harvey crazy, like the first story must be eight pages, the second story seven, the third six and the fourth seven . . .

KURTZMAN: Yahhh!

GAINES: As long as he did these things, I didn't care what else he did. Important things were important, but what the hell. And I had faith in Harvey. He would come up with these insane ideas, and they were very funny.

BENSON: *As a reader, it knocked me out that you were doing dangerous things.*

KURTZMAN: I don't think we felt they were dangerous.

BENSON: *Maybe they weren't, but they seemed to be.*

KURTZMAN: They were outrageous. I think that the outrage is probably more dramatic to the reader than it is to the people who are committing the outrage, because when you commit an outrage you have a whole motivation going for it that you understand. When you're witnessing the outrage you see the dramatic aspects rather than the reasoning. It's like . . . I'll think up an example in the next hour . . . the murderer isn't as impressed by his murder as people reading about it in the paper.

BENSON: *I loved the upside down cover,* Mad *# 17, where you carried the concept through fully, so that when you opened the cover there were the real back-of-the-book ads upside down.*

KURTZMAN: I got such a kick out of the Johnson Smith cover [*# 21*], which I still read in my spare time. The thing has about three acres of two point type that you have to read with a microscope. And every sentence is funny. About a year's worth of writing went into that cover. It's sort of like reading the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin. Someday you'll print that cover twelve times up, and it will all be revealed.

ADELE KURTZMAN: I remember that the black marbled composition notebook cover brought a lot of objections from teachers.

KURTZMAN: We told kids to take *Mad* into class disguised as a notebook.

GAINES: That was so absurd. It was such a funny idea. The Hartford *Courant* I remember especially—because I was so surprised, they had a reputation for being one of the best papers in the country—they *blasted* us for that thing, and they really seriously thought that we had published that cover to really, really let kids sneak it into class. I mean, that's the way people were in those days. There's nothing you can do with people like that. You ask, weren't we afraid of doing things . . . the things that we got into the most trouble with were the things that we never dreamed would get us into trouble. Like when we had the Mona Lisa on the cover, and the Catholics thought it was the Virgin Mary.

BENSON: *How did you come up with the idea of using Wolverton?*

the SIXTIES by H. Kurtzman

WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT THE SIXTIES?
YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.
YOU CAN'T WRITE? IT ONLY TAKES A MINUTE.
THE FIFTIES AND FORTIES AREN'T SO HOT EITHER.
EAT, SKELETON!
LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE TWENTIES!
THE THIRTIES ARE VERY INTERESTING.
TAKE THE TEENS. ... PLEASE.
9/72

At the end of the 1960's a promoter had a brilliant idea—a book in which leading artists and cartoonists would each have a page to make their comment on that decade. The project fell through, but not before several artists, including Kurtzman, had completed pages. His page skirts the subject, one might say.

GAINES: Harvey was looking to make fun of *Life*, which always had beautiful girls on the cover. So I guess he figured, "Where could I get the most horrible-looking girl" And who else could do it but the creator of Lena the Hyena?

KURTZMAN: There was a certain amount of commerce with Wolverton in advance of that. I'd already used him in "The Face on the Barroom Floor." But do you remember how I shot the photograph of the skyline on that cover? I was so excited. I went up to the bathroom of our office building on Lafayette Street and shot it from the bathroom window.

GAINES: Oh, that's a great little story. I never knew that.

BENSON: *It's interesting that the artists who seemed so ideally suited for the war books suddenly became overnight so ideally suited to* Mad. *And became in fact the archetype of a certain kind of humor style.*

GAINES: Well, Elder really only came into his own with the humor. He had only been inking Severin's stuff for the war books.

KURTZMAN: The pattern makes sense and all comes together when you consider wavelengths and vibrations, which I'm a great believer in. I think that you work well together with people when you have sympathetic vibrations. Jack and Willy were friends, we had a similar lifestyle. They were very easy for me to communicate with. And interestingly enough, our lifestyle has carried us all in the same direction. Many of the EC guys have moved on in similar patterns . . . who's married and who isn't.

GAINES: To interrupt this with a funny story—not funny, interesting—that isn't quite on the point. In 1963 or '4, four of us on a *Mad* trip to Puerto Rico engaged a young couple who ran a snorkeling excursion business. There was Joe Orlando, Al Jaffe, Al Feldstein and myself. And we went out with this couple, had a wonderful day. A few years later I went back down there with my kids, and I remembered this wonderful day and I wanted my kids to go snorkeling. By this time I was separated from Nancy. So I look in the red book and I find the name. I call him and, sure enough, he comes in the same station wagon and picks us up, and as he's driving us I ask, "Where's your wife?" And he says, "Oh, we were divorced." And suddenly it occurs to me: so are the four guys who were with him that day.

KURTZMAN: I think practically everybody in the group broke up, with the exception of the guys who worked with me.

GAINES: Except for Wally.

KURTZMAN: Well, Wally was the hardest one to work with. But I used to work with Will and Jack and John Severin. And they were the guys who didn't break up in the whole organization.

GAINES: That's not quite true. Bernie Krigstein didn't break up. Jack Kamen didn't break up. George Evans . . .

KURTZMAN: You're right.

GAINES: I would say about half the guys broke up and half didn't, of the old group of 14. Johnny Craig is still with his wife. Graham Ingels of course broke up.

BENSON: *Some* Hey Look's *were run in the* Mad *comics . . .*

KURTZMAN: I was trying to figure out ways to fill in.

GAINES: Harvey couldn't quite make the schedule. But in a way the *Hey Look*'s were the reason for *Mad*'s existence, so it seems proper that they should have had a place in *Mad* somewhere. Because if I hadn't seen those *Hey Look*'s, it never would have occurred to me to suggest that Harvey do a humor magazine.

KURTZMAN: The *Hey Look*'s were sort of the beginning of everything. They had a certain spirit because of the way they were done. In that particular case also, Stan Lee was particularly democratic in the way he gave me independence. I guess it was just because they didn't count. So they were done with that same free spirit of no controls.

BENSON: *When* Mad *became a success about a dozen imitations came out about the end of 1953. I suppose it was just a continuation of what had happened to the other EC books, but how did you feel about those imitations?*

GAINES: Bitter, of course. In the beginning, 1950, when we started our New Trend magazines EC was trendsetting. We were publishing what we felt was original and never before done, in quite that way at any rate. And it's true that everybody was imitating them. And when *Mad* came along, that was even *more* original in a way. And I always resented people stealing our stuff and imitating it. There was nothing you could do about it. Harvey did about as good as you could with his "Beware of Imitations" ad, which was very funny and is still up-to-date.

KURTZMAN: Creativity is not a commodity that's easy to come by. And certainly in the comic business, while there are a lot of guys who can render, there aren't as many guys who are creative. Everybody's hungry for new styles and new things, and they're inspired by them. When someone breaks new ground, the crowd quickly rushes through the break. But that's good, that's OK. That's the way things evolve and change, and that's life. Imitation is flattery and I never resented it that much. But I guess we always all felt that there were a lot of greenbacks slipping away. There's always that nagging thing in the back of your mind that you've started something and you want all the profits yourself. But I think that when you come out with something original you do tend to create a market. You've created new commerce where none existed before for both yourself and for imitators. *Playboy* swears up and down that the existence of *Penthouse* and *Oui* has created a new super market where there was none before, so they are *all* selling. But it's hard for me to believe that it will go on forever.

GAINES: Well, that did happen with *Playboy*, which has had a number of successful imitations which made money and a lot of which are still in existence. But that wasn't so true with *Mad*, because all those imitations that came out while *Mad* was a comic were very short-lived. They all completely missed what *Mad* was about, and just tried to imitate its craziness. They didn't last long, three issues, six issues. I don't think they made a market at all.

KURTZMAN: You know, one of the hardest things for me to take, when I was rattling around after *Trump*, and I'd have a project here and a thing there . . . there was one publisher, and I really forget who it was—possibly I deliberately forget—he wanted me to do something, and we were talking over ideas. And I said, "Let's do a humor thing." And he said, "This isn't good enough. I want you to do it like *Mad*."

GAINES: Did he know what he was saying? Did he know who he was talking to?

KURTZMAN: What he was trying to say was, why don't you do something crazier. Like, when the imitations of *Mad* came out they said, "Oh, *Mad*. OK, it's obviously a crazy thing, let's do something crazy crazy and we got it." But obviously they didn't get it, because they didn't understand the essence of what it was.

GAINES: But the point is that *Mad*'s imitations never opened a big market. The only magazines that have lasted any length of time are *Sick* and *Cracked*. And they hold on incredibly. How they hold on I don't know, because I know what they sell, and we literally outsell them something like 12 to one.

KURTZMAN: They hold on with John Severin. Also I suspect part of their secret is that they're distributor oriented operations. The guy who does *Cracked*, Sproul, is the son of a very big distributor's agent, old Joe Sproul.

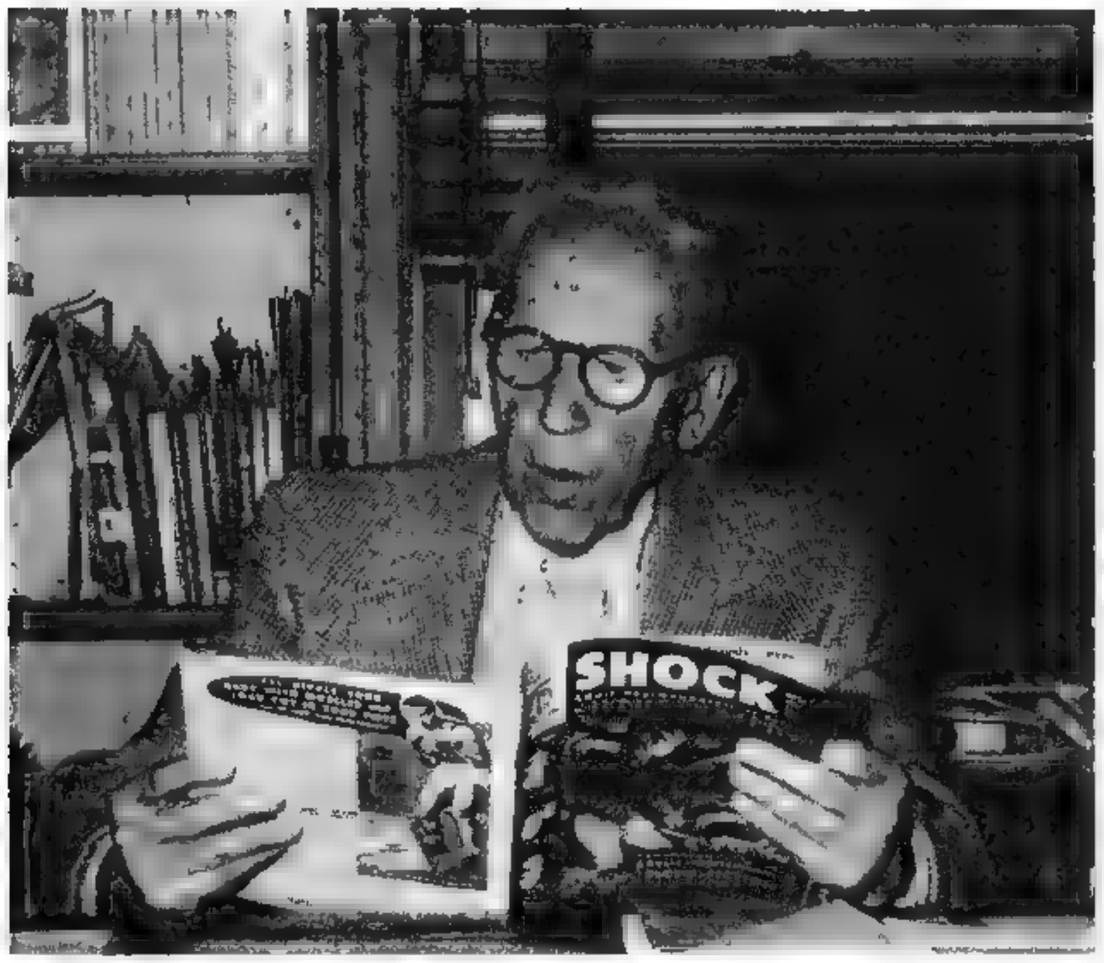
GAINES: Joe Sproul used to work with Wyn at Ace, and I knew Joe. He was a very nice man, and as a matter of fact I was almost distributed through Ace. I was signed up to Ace, and then we unsigned it because of complications too involved to go into here.

KURTZMAN: When I think back to the history of the problems of the magazines and how those things used to depress me . . . Did you watch *An American Family*? There was an interview with this guy Loud, the father. He's a very competent American businessman in some kind of heavy equipment work, with apparently a very nice business going. And the interviewer was asking him, "Do you ever feel despair about your son?" And he leaned back and he said, "Despair? I don't think I've ever felt despair; well, maybe once or twice in my life." And I was thinking, there are people who don't feel despair! There are actually people who don't feel despair. And I remember these problems you used to have with distribution and so on. Despair! Despair!

This interview was recorded on May 9, 1973. It was transcribed by Harry Narunsky, and edited for publication by John Benson.

PAUL,

THE HORROR COMICS,



AND DR. WERTHAM

BY ROBERT WARSHOW

My son, Paul, who is eleven years old, belongs to the EC Fan-Addict Club, a synthetic organization set up as a promotional device by the Entertaining Comics Group, publishers of *Mad* ("Tales Calculated to Drive You MAD—Humor in a Jugular Vein"), *Panic* ("This is No Comic Book, This is a PANIC—Humor in a Varicose Vein"), *Tales from the Crypt, The Vault of Horror, Weird Science-Fantasy, Shock SuspenStories, Crime SuspenStories* ("Jolting Tales of Tension in the EC Tradition"), and, I imagine, various other such periodicals. For his twenty-five-cent membership fee (soon to be raised to fifty cents), the EC Fan-Addict receives a humorously phrased certificate of membership, a wallet-size "identification card," a pin and a shoulder-patch bearing the club emblem, and occasional mailings of the club bulletin, which publishes chitchat about the writers, artists, and editors, releases trial balloons on ideas for new comic books, lists members' requests for back numbers, and in general tries to foster in the membership a sense of identification with this particular publishing company and its staff. *EC Fan-Addict Club Bulletin* # 2, March 1954, also suggests some practical activities for the members. "Everytime you pass your newsstand, fish out the EC's from the bottom of the piles or racks and put 'em on top. . . . BUT PLEASE, YOU MONSTERS, DO IT NEATLY!"

Paul, I think, does not quite take this "club" with full seriousness, but it is clear that he does in some way value his membership in it, at least for the present. He has had the club shoulder-patch put on one of his jackets, and when his membership pin broke recently he took the trouble to send for a new one. He has recruited a few of his schoolmates into the organization. If left free to do so, he will buy any comic book which bears the EC trademark, and is usually quite satisfied with the purchase. This is not a matter of "loyalty," but seems to reflect some real standard of discrimination; he has occasionally sampled other comic books which imitate the EC group and finds them inferior.

It should be said that the EC comics do in fact display a certain imaginative flair. *Mad* and *Panic* are devoted to a wild, undisciplined machine-gun attack on American popular culture, creating an atmosphere of nagging hilarity something like the clowning of Jerry Lewis. They have come out with covers parodying the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Life*, and once with a vaguely "serious" cover in imitation of magazines like *Harper's* or the *Atlantic*. ("Do you want to look like an idiot reading comic books all your life? Buy *Mad*, then you can look like an idiot reading high-class literature.") The current issue of *Mad* (dated August) has Leonardo's Mona Lisa on the cover, smiling as enigmatically as ever and cradling a copy of *Mad* in her arms. The tendency of the humor, in its insistent violence, is to reduce all culture to indiscriminate anarchy. These comic books are in a line of descent from the Marx Brothers, from the Three Stooges whose funniest business is to poke their fingers in each other's eyes, and from that comic orchestra which starts out playing "serious" music and ends up with all the instruments smashed. A very funny parody of the comic strip "Little Orphan Annie," in *Mad* or *Panic*, shows Annie cut into small pieces by a train because Daddy Warbucks' watch is slow and he has arrived just too late for the last minute; Annie's detached head complains: "It hurts when I laugh." The parody ends with the most obvious and most vulgar explanation of why Annie calls

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The photograph of Paul Warshow at age 10 was taken February 1954 at Lake Placid, N.Y. by Robert Warshow. The photograph of Dr. Wertham was taken November 1976 at his home in Kempton, Pa. by E.B. Boatner.

Daddy Warbucks "Daddy"; I had some difficulty in explaining that joke to Paul. One of the funnier stories in *Panic* tells of a man who finds himself on the television program "This Is Your Life"; as his old friends and neighbors appear one by one to fill in the story of his life, it becomes clear that nobody has seen his wife since 11:30 P.M. on the ninth of October 1943; shortly before that he had made some rather significant purchases: arsenic, a shovel, quicklime. Evidence piles up, including the actual bones of his wife (dug up by his old dog, Rover, who also appears on the program and will do nothing but growl at his former master). At the end of the program, of course, the man is arrested for murder; television's assault on privacy has reached its logical conclusion. I understand that *Mad* is rather popular among college students, and I have myself read it with a kind of irritated pleasure.

The straightforward crime and horror comics, such as *Shock SuspenStories*, *Crime SuspenStories*, or *The Vault of Horror*, exhibit the same undisciplined imaginativeness and violence without the leavening of humor. One of the more gruesome stories in *Crime SuspenStories* is simply a "serious" version of the story I have outlined from *Panic:* again a man murders his wife (this time with an ax) and buries her in the back yard, and again he is trapped on a television program. In another story, a girl some ten or eleven years old, unhappy in her home life, shoots her father, frames her mother and the mother's lover for the murder, and after their death in the electric chair ("Mommy went first. Then Steve.") is shown living happily with Aunt Kate, who can give her the emotional security she has lacked. The child winks at us from the last panel in appreciation of her own cleverness. Some of the stories, if one takes them simply in terms of their plots, are not unlike the stories of Poe or other writers of horror tales; the publishers of such comic books have not failed to point this out. But of course the bareness of the comic-book form makes an enormous difference. Both the humor and the horror in their utter lack of modulation yield too readily to the child's desire to receive his satisfactions immediately, thus tending to subvert one of the chief elements in the process of growing up, which is to learn to wait; a child's developing appreciation of the complexity of good literature is surely one of the things that contribute to his eventual acceptance of the complexity of life.

I do not suppose that Paul's enthusiasm for the products of this particular publisher will necessarily last very long. At various times in the past he has been a devotee of the Dell Publishing Company (*Gene Autry, Red Ryder, Tarzan, The Lone Ranger,* etc.), National Comics (*Superman, Action Comics, Batman,* etc.), *Captain Marvel, The Marvel Family, Zoo Funnies* (very briefly), *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon,* and, on a higher level, *Pogo Possum.* He has around a hundred and fifty comic books in his room, though he plans to weed out some of those which no longer interest him. He keeps closely aware of dates of publication and watches the newsstands from day to day and from corner to corner if possible; when a comic book he is concerned with is late in appearing, he is likely to get in touch with the publisher to find out what has caused the delay. During the *Pogo* period, indeed, he seemed to be in almost constant communication with Walt Kelly and the Post-Hall Syndicate, asking for original drawings (he has two of them), investigating delays in publication of the comic books (there are quarterly 15-cent comic books, published by Dell, in addition to the daily newspaper strip and the frequent paperbound volumes published at one dollar by Simon and Schuster), or tracking down rumors that a Pogo shirt or some other object was to be put on the market (the rumors were false; *Pogo* is being kept free of "commercialization"). During the 1953 presidential campaign, Pogo was put forward as a "candidate," and there were buttons saying "I Go Pogo"; Paul managed to acquire about a dozen of these, although, as he was told, they were intended primarily for distribution among college students. Even now he maintains a distant fondness for Pogo, but I am no longer required to buy the New York *Post* every day in order to save the daily strips for him. I think that Paul's desire to put himself directly in touch with the processes by which the comic books are produced may be the expression of a fundamental detachment which helps to protect him from them; the comic books are not a "universe" to him, but simply objects produced for his entertainment.

When Paul was home from school for his spring vacation this year, I took him and two of his classmates to visit the offices of the Entertaining Comics Group at 225 Lafayette Street. (I had been unable to find the company in the telephone book until I thought of looking it up as "Educational Comics"; I am told that this is one of five corporate names under which the firm operates.) As it turned out, there was nothing to be seen except a small anteroom containing a pretty receptionist and a rack of comic books; the editors were in conference and could not be disturbed. (Of course I knew there must be conferences, but this discovery that they actually occur at a particular time and place somehow struck me; I should have liked to know how the editors talked to each other.) In spite of our confinement to the anteroom, however, the children seemed to experience as great a sense of exaltation as if they had found themselves in the actual presence of, say, Gary Cooper.

One of Paul's two friends signed up there and then in the EC Fan-Addict Club (Paul had recruited the other one into the club earlier) and each boy bought seven or eight back numbers. When the receptionist obligingly went into the inner offices to see if she could collect a few autographs, the boys by crowding around the door as she opened it managed to catch a glimpse of one of the artists, Johnny Craig, whom Paul recognized from a drawing of him that had appeared in one of the comic books. In response to the boys' excitement, the door was finally opened wide so that for a few seconds they could look at Mr. Craig; he waved at them pleasantly from behind his drawing board and then the door was closed. Before we left, the publisher himself, William Gaines, passed through the anteroom, presumably on his way to the men's room. He too was recognized, shook hands with the boys, and gave them his autograph.

I am sure the children's enthusiasm contained some element of self-parody, or at any rate an effort to live up to the situation—after all, a child is often very uncertain about what is exciting, and how much. It is quite likely that the little sheets of paper bearing the precious autographs have all been misplaced by now. But there is no doubt that the excursion was a great success.

A few weeks later Mr. Gaines testified before a Congressional committee that is investigating the effects of comic books on children and their relation to juvenile delinquency. Mr. Gaines, as one would expect, was opposed to any suggestion that comic books be censored. In his opinion, he said, the only restrictions on the editors of comic books should be the ordinary restrictions of good taste. Senator Kefauver presented for his examination the cover of an issue of *Crime SuspenStories* (drawn by Johnny Craig) which shows a man holding by its long blond hair the severed head of a woman. In the man's other hand is the dripping ax with which he has just carried out the decapitation, and the lower part of the woman's body, with the skirt well up on the plump thighs, appears in the background. It was an illustration for the story I have described in which the murderer is finally trapped on a television program. Did Mr. Gaines think this cover in good taste? Yes, he did—for a horror comic. If the head had been held a little higher, so as to show blood dripping from the severed neck, that would have been bad taste. Mr. Gaines went on to say that he considers himself to be the originator of horror comics and is proud of it. He mentioned also that he is a graduate of the New York University School of Education, qualified to teach in the high schools.

I did not fail to clip the report of Mr. Gaines's testimony from the *Times* and send it to Paul, together with a note in which I said that while I was in some confusion about the comic-book question, at least I was sure I did not see what Mr. Gaines had to be so proud about. But Paul has learned a few things in the course of the running argument about comic books that has gone on between us. He thanked me for sending the clipping and declined to be drawn into a discussion. Such discussions have not proved very fruitful for him in the past.

They have not been very fruitful for me either. I know that I don't like the comics myself and that makes me uncomfortable to see Paul reading them. But it's hard to explain to Paul why I feel this way, and somewhere along the line it seems to have been established that Paul is always entitled to an explanation: he is a child of our time.

I said once that the gross and continual violence of the comic books was objectionable.

He said: "What's so terrible about things being exciting?"

Well, nothing really; but there are books that are much more exciting, and the comics keep you from reading the books.

But I read books *too.* (He does, especially when there are no comics available.)

Why read the comics at all?

But you said yourself that *Mad* is pretty good. You gotta admit!

Yes, I know I did. But it's not that good. . . . Oh, the comics are just stupid, that's all, and I don't see why you should be wasting so much time with them.

Maybe they're stupid *sometimes.* But look at this one. This one is *really good.* Just read it! Why won't you just *read* it?

Usually I refuse to "just read it," but that puts me at once at a disadvantage. How can I condemn something without knowing what it is? And sometimes, when I do read it, I am forced to grant that maybe this particular story does have a certain minimal distinction, and then I'm lost. Didn't I say myself that *Mad* is pretty good?

I suppose this kind of discussion can be carried on better than I seem able to do, but it's a bad business getting into discussions anyway. If you're against comic books, then you say: no comic books. I understand there are parents who manage to do that. The best—or worst—that has happened to Paul was a limit on the number of comic books he was allowed to have in a week: I think it was three. But that was intolerable; there were special occasions, efforts to borrow against next week, negotiations for revision of the allotment; there was *always* a discussion.

The fundamental difficulty, in a way—the thing that leaves both Paul and me uncertain of our ground—is that the comics obviously do not constitute a serious problem in his life. He is in that Fan-Addict Club, all right, and he likes to make a big show of being interested in EC comics above all else that the world has to offer, but he and I both know that while he may be a fan, he is not an addict. His life at school of pretty busy (this has been his first year at school away from home) and comics are not encouraged, though they certainly do find their way in. Paul subscribes to *Mad* and, I think, *Pogo* (also to *Zoo Funnies* and *Atomic Mouse,* but he doesn't read those any more), and he is still inclined to haunt the newsstands when he is in New York; indeed, the first thing he wants to do when he gets off the train is buy a comic. In spite of all obstacles, I suppose he manages to read a hundred in a year, at worst perhaps even a hundred and fifty—that would take maybe seventy-five to a hundred hours. On the other hand, he doesn't see much television or listen much to the radio, and he does read books, draw, paint, play with toads, look at things through a microscope, write stories and poems, imitate Jerry Lewis, and in general do everything that one could reasonably want him to do, plus a few extras like skiing and riding. He seems to me a more alert, skillful, and self-possessed child than I or any of my friends were at eleven, if that's any measure.

Moreover, I can't see that his hundred or hundred and fifty comic books are having any very specific effects on him. The bloodiest of ax murders apparently does not disturb his sleep or increase the violence of his own impulses. *Mad* and *Panic* have helped to develop in him a style of humor which may occasionally be wearing but is in general pretty successful; and anyway, Jerry Lewis has had as much to do with this as the comics. Paul's writing is highly melodramatic, but that's only to be expected, and he is more likely to model himself on Erle Stanley Gardner or Wilkie Collins than on *Crime Suspen-Stories.* Sometimes the melodrama goes over the line into the gruesome, and in that the comic books no doubt play a role; but if there were no comic books, Paul would be reading things like "The Pit and the Pendulum" or *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*—which, to be sure, would be better. Now and then he has expressed a desire to be a comic-book artist when he grows up, or a television comedian. So far as I can judge, he has no inclination to accept as real the comic-book conception of human nature which sees everyone as a potential criminal and every criminal as an absolute criminal.*

As you see, I really don't have much reason to complain; that's why Paul wins the arguments. But of course I complain anyway. I don't like the comic books—not even *Mad,* whatever I may have unguardedly allowed myself to say—and I would prefer it if Paul did not read them. Like most middle-class parents, I devote a good deal of over-anxious attention to his education, to the "influences" that play on him and the "problems" that arise for him. Almost anything in his life is likely to seem important to me, and I find it hard to accept the idea that there should be one area of his experience, apparently of considerable importance to him, which will have no important consequences. One comic book a week or ten, they *must* have an effect. How can I be expected to believe that it will be a good one?

Testifying in opposition to Mr. Gaines at the Congressional hearing was Dr. Fredric Wertham, a psychiatrist who has specialized in work with problem and delinquent children. Dr. Wertham has been studying and attacking the comic books for a number of years. His position on the question is now presented in full in his recently published book *Seduction of the Innocent.*

The most impressive part of the book is its illustrations: two dozen or so examples of comic-book art displaying the outer limits of that "good taste" which Mr. Gaines suggests might be a sufficient restraint upon the editors. There is a picture of a baseball game in which the ball is a man's head with one eye dangling from its socket, the bat is a severed leg, the catcher wears a dismembered human torso as chest protector, the baselines are marked with stretched-out intestines, the bases are marked with the lungs, liver, and heart, the rosin-bag is the dead man's stomach, and the umpire dusts off home plate with the scalp. There is a close-up of a hanged man, tongue protruding, eyeballs turned back, the break in the neck clearly drawn. Another scene shows two men being dragged to death face down over a rocky road. "A couple more miles oughta do th' trick!" says the driver of the car. "It better," says his companion. "These ****!! GRAVEL ROADS are tough on tires!" "But you gotta admit," replies the driver, "there's nothing like 'em for ERASING FACES!" And so on. Dr. Wertham could surely have presented many more such examples if he had the space and could have obtained permission to reproduce them. From Paul's collection, I recall with special uneasiness a story in which a rotting corpse returns from the grave; in full color, the hues and contours of decay were something to see.

Among the recurrent motifs of the comic books, Dr. Wertham lists: hanging, flagellation, rape, torture of women, tying up of women, injury to the eye (one of the pictures he reproduces shows a horrifying close-up of a woman's eye about to be pierced by an ice-pick). If a child reads ten comics of this sort a week (a not unusual figure), he may absorb in the course of a year from fifteen hundred to two thousand stories emphasizing these themes (a comic book contains three or four stories). If he takes them with any seriousness at all—and it is difficult to believe that he will not—they surely cannot fail to affect his developing attitudes towards violence, sex, and social restraint.

What the effects will be, and how deep-seated, is not so easy to determine. And here Dr. Wertham is not very helpful. When he tells us of children who have been found hanging, with a comic-book nearby opened to a picture of a hanging, one can readily share his alarm. The fact that these children

* The assumption that human beings will always follow out the logic of their character to the limit is one of the worst elements in the comic books, and is pretty widespread in them. If a man is a burglar, he will not hesitate to commit murder; and if he is going to commit murder, he is often as likely to think of boiling his victim in oil as of shooting him. In the radio serial "Mark Trail," a program no longer in existence which was based on the comic strip "Mark Trail," men engaged in such illegal activities as hunting beaver out of season would unhesitatingly shoot any game warden who came upon them. (The theme of the program was supposed to be conservation.) This kind of "logic" may seem very proper to children. When Paul was about four or five, a baby-sitter read him the story of Bluebeard. I was a little disturbed when he mentioned this to me the next morning and I tried to probe his reactions.

I said something like: "An exciting story, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Paul.

"That Bluebeard was quite a nasty character, wasn't he?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know," said Paul.

"What do you mean you don't know? Didn't he try to murder his wife?"

"Well," said Paul, "he *told* her not to look in that closet."

were probably seriously disturbed before they ever read a comic book, and the fact that fantasies of hanging are in any case common among children, does not relieve one of the feeling that comic books may have provided the immediate stimulus that led to these deaths. Even if there were no children who actually hanged themselves, is it conceivable that comic books which play so directly and so graphically on their deepest anxieties should be without evil consequences? On the other hand, when Dr. Wertham tells us of children who have injured themselves trying to fly because they have read *Superman* or *Captain Marvel,* one becomes skeptical. Children always want to fly and are always likely to try it. The elimination of *Superman* will not eliminate this sort of incident. Like many other children, I made my own attempt to fly after seeing *Peter Pan;* as I recall, I didn't really expect it to work, but I thought: who knows?

In general, Dr. Wertham pursues his argument with a humorless dedication that tends to put all phenomena and all evidence on the same level. Discussing *Superman,* he suggests that it wouldn't take much to change the "S" on that great chest to "S.S." With a straight face he tells us of a little boy who was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up and said, "I want to be a sex maniac!" He objects to advertisements for binoculars in comic books because a city child can have nothing to do with binoculars except to spy on the neighbors. He reports the case of a boy of twelve who had misbehaved with his sister and threatened to break her arm if she told anybody. "This is not the kind of thing that boys used to tell their little sisters," Dr. Wertham informs us. He quotes a sociologist who "analyzed" ten comic-book heroes of the Superman type and found that all of them "may well be designated as psychopathic deviates." As an indication that there are some children "who are influenced in the right direction by thoughtful parents," he tells us of the four-year-old son of one of his associates who was in the hospital with scarlet fever; when the nurses offered him some comic books, the worthy child refused them, "explaining . . . that his father had said they are not good for children." Dr. Wertham will take at face value anything a child tells him, either as evidence of the harmful effects of the comic books ("I think sex all boils down to anxiety," one boy told him; where could he have got such an idea except from the comics?) or as direct support for his own views: he quotes approvingly a letter by a thirteen-year-old boy taking solemn exception to the display of nudity in comic books, and a fourteen-year-old boy's analysis of the economic motives which lead psychiatrists to give their endorsements to comic books. I suspect it would be a dull child indeed who could go to Dr. Wertham's clinic and not discover very quickly that most of his problematical behavior can be explained in terms of the comic books.

The publishers complain with justice that Dr. Wertham makes no distinction between bad comic books and "good" ones. The Dell Publishing Company, for instance, the largest of the publishers, claims to have no objectionable comics on its list, which runs to titles like *Donald Duck* and *The Lone Ranger.* National Comics Publications (*Superman,* etc.), which runs second to Dell, likewise claims to avoid objectionable material and has an "editorial code" which specifically forbids the grosser forms of violence or any undue emphasis on sex. (If anything, this "code" is too puritanical, but mechanically fabricated culture can only be held in check by mechanical restrictions.) Dr. Wertham is largely able to ignore the distinction between "bad" and "good" because most of us find it hard to conceive of what a "good" comic book might be.*

Yet in terms of their effect on children, there must be a significant difference between *The Lone Ranger* or *Superman* or *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* on the one hand and, say, the comic book from which Dr. Wertham took that picture of a baseball game played with the disconnected parts of a human body. If *The Lone Ranger* and *Superman* are bad, they are bad in a different way and on a different level. They are crude, unimaginative, banal, vulgar, ultimately corrupting. They are also, as Dr. Wertham claims, violent—but always within certain limits. Perhaps the worst thing they do is to meet the juvenile imagination on its crudest level and offer it an immediate and stereotyped satisfaction. That may be bad enough, but very much the same things could be said of much of our radio and television entertainment and many of our mass-circulation magazines. The objection to the more unrestrained horror and crime comics must be a different one. It is even possible that these outrageous productions may be in one sense "better" than *The Lone Ranger* or *Sergeant Preston,* for in their absolute lack of restraint they tend to be somewhat livelier and more imaginative; certainly they are often less boring. But that does not make them any less objectionable as reading matter for children. Quite the contrary, in fact: *Superman* and *Donald Duck* and *The Lone Ranger* are stultifying; *Crime SuspenStories* and *The Vault of Horror* are stimulating.

A few years ago I heard Dr. Wertham debate with Al Capp on the radio. Mr. Capp at that time had introduced into *Li'l Abner* the story of the shmoos, agreeable little animals of 100 per cent utility who would fall down dead in an ecstasy of joy if one merely looked at them hungrily. All the parts of a shmoo's body, except the eyes, were edible, tasting variously like porterhouse steak, butter, turkey, probably even chocolate cake; and the eyes were useful as suspender buttons. Mr. Capp's fantasy was in this—as, I think, in most of his work—mechanical and rather tasteless. But Dr. Wertham was not content to say anything like that. For him, the story of the shmoos was an incitement to sadistic violence comparable to anything else he had discovered in his reading of comics. He was especially disturbed by the use of the shmoo's eyes as suspender buttons, something he took to be merely another repetition of that motif of injury to the eye which is exemplified in his present book by the picture of a woman about to be blinded with an ice-pick. In the violence of Dr. Wertham's discourse on this subject one got a glimpse of his limitations as an investigator of social phenomena.

For the fact is that Dr. Wertham's picture of society and human nature is one that a reader of comic books—at any rate, let us say, a reader of the "good" comic books—might not find entirely unfamiliar. Dr. Wertham's world, like the world of the comic books, is one where the logic of personal interest is inexorable, and *Seduction of the Innocent* is a kind of crime comic book for parents, as its lurid title alone would lead one to expect. There is the same simple conception of motives, the same sense of overhanging doom, the same melodramatic emphasis on pathology, the same direct and immediate relation between cause and effect. If a juvenile criminal is found in possession of comic books, the comic books produced the crime. If a publisher of comic books, alarmed by attacks on the industry, retains a psychiatrist to advise him on suitable content for his publications, it follows *necessarily* that the arrangement is a dishonest one. If a psychiatrist accepts a fee of perhaps $150 a month for carrying out such an assignment (to judge by what Dr. Wertham himself tells us, the fees are not particularly high), that psychiatrist has been "bought"; it is of no consequence to point out how easily a psychiatrist can make $150. It is therefore all right to appeal to the authority of a sociologist who has "analyzed" *Superman* "according to criteria worked out by the psychologist Gordon W. Allport" and has found him to be a "psychopathic deviate," but no authority whatever can be attached to the "bought" psychiatrist who has been professionally engaged in the problem of comic books. If no comic-book publisher has been prosecuted under the laws against contributing to the delinquency of minors, it cannot be because those laws may not be applicable; it must be because "no district attorney, no judge, no complainant, has ever had the courage to make a complaint."

Dr. Wertham also exhibits a moral confusion which, even if it does not correspond exactly to anything in the comic books, one can still hope will not gain a footing among children. Comic-book writers and artists working for the more irresponsible publishers have told Dr. Wertham of receiving instructions to put more violence, more blood, and more sex into their work, and of how reluctantly they have carried out these instructions. Dr. Wertham writes: "Crime-comic-book writers should not be blamed for comic books. They are not free men. They are told what to do and they do it—or else. They often are, I have found, very critical of comics. . . . But

* I leave out of consideration a few comics like *Pogo Possum* and *Dennis the Menace* which I think could be called good without quotation marks, though it is possible Dr. Wertham might find grounds for objection to these also.

of course . . . they have to be afraid of the ruthless economic power of the comic-book industry. In every letter I have received from a writer, stress is laid on requests to keep his identity secret." What can Dr. Wertham mean by that ominous "or else" which explains everything and pardons everything? Will the recalcitrant writer be dragged face down over a rocky road? Surely not. What Dr. Wertham means is simply that the man might lose his job and be forced to find less lucrative employment. This economic motive is a sufficient excuse for the man who thought up that gruesome baseball game—I suppose because he is a "worker." But it is no excuse for a psychiatrist who advises the publishers of *Superman* and sees to it that no dismembered bodies are played with in that comic book. And of course it is no excuse for a publisher—he is "the industry." This monolithic concept of "the industry" is what makes it pointless to discover whether there is any difference between one publisher and another; it was not men who produced that baseball game—it was "the industry." Would Dr. Wertham suggest to the children who come to his clinic that they cannot be held responsible for anything they do so long as they are doing it to make a living? I am sure he would not. But he does quote with the greatest respect the words of that intelligent fourteen-year-old who was able to see so clearly that if a psychiatrist receives a fee, one can obviously not expect that he will continue to act honestly. And it is not too hard to surmise where this young student of society got the idea.

Apparently, also, when you are fighting a "ruthless industry" you are under no obligation to be invariably careful about what you say. Dr. Wertham very properly makes fun of the psychiatric defenders of comic books who consider it a sufficient justification of anything to say that it satisfies a "deep" need of a child. But on his side of the argument he is willing to put forward some equally questionable "deep" analysis of his own, most notably in his discussion of the supposedly equivocal relation between Batman and the young boy Robin; this particular analysis seems to me a piece of utter frivolity. He is also willing to create the impression that all comic books are on the level of the worst of them, and that psychiatrists have endorsed even such horrors as the piercing of women's eyes and the whimsical dismemberment of bodies. (In fact, the function performed by the reputable psychiatrists who have acted as advisers to the publishers has been to suggest what kind of comic books would be "healthy" reading for children. One can disagree with their idea of what is "healthy," as Dr. Wertham does, or one can be troubled, as I am, at the addition of this new element of fabrication to cultural objects already so mechanical; but there is no justification for implying that these psychiatrists have been acting dishonestly or irresponsibly.)

None of this, however, can entirely destroy Dr. Wertham's case. It remains true that there is something questionable in the tendency of psychiatrists to place such stress on the supposed psychological needs of children as to encourage the spread of material which is at best subversive of the same children's literacy, sensitivity, and general cultivation. *Superman* and *The Three Musketeers* may serve the same psychological needs, but it still matters whether a child reads one or the other. We are left also with the underworld of publishing which produced that baseball game, which I don't suppose I shall easily forget, and with Mr. Gaines' notions of good taste, with the children who have hanged themselves, and with the advertisements for switch-blade knives, pellet guns, and breast developers which accompany the sadistic and erotic stimulations of the worst comic books.* We are left above all with the fact that for many thousands of children comic books, whether "bad" or "good," represent virtually their only contact with culture. There are children in the schools of our large cities who carry knives and sometimes guns. There are children who reach the last year of high school without ever reading a single book. Even leaving aside the increase in juvenile crime, there seem to be larger numbers of children than ever before who, without going over the line into criminality, live almost entirely in a juvenile underground largely out of touch with the demands of social responsibility, culture, and personal refinement, and who grow up into an unhappy isolation where they are sustained by little else but the routine of the working day, the unceasing clamor of television and the juke boxes, and still, in their adult years, the comic books. This is a very fundamental problem; to blame the comic books, as Dr. Wertham does, is simple-minded. But to say that the comics do not contribute to the situation would be like denying the importance of the children's classics and the great English and European novels in the development of an educated man.

The problem of regulation or even suppression of the comic books, however, is a great deal more difficult than Dr. Wertham imagines. If the publication of comic books were forbidden, surely something on an equally low level would appear to take their place. Children do need some "sinful" world of their own to which they can retreat from the demands of the adult world; as we sweep away one juvenile dung heap, they will move on to another. The point is to see that the dung heap does not swallow them up, and to hope it may be one that will bring forth blossoms. But our power is limited; it is the children who have the initiative: they will choose what they want. In any case, it is not likely that the level of literacy and culture would be significantly raised if the children simply turned their attention more exclusively to television and the love, crime, and movie magazines. Dr. Wertham, to be sure, seems quite ready to carry his fight into these areas as well; ultimately, one suspects, he would like to see our culture entirely hygienic. I cannot agree with this tendency. I myself would not like to live surrounded by the kind of culture Dr. Wertham could thoroughly approve of, and what I would not like for myself I would hardly desire for Paul. The children must take their chances like the rest of us. But when Dr. Wertham is dealing with the worst of the comic books he is on strong ground; some kind of regulation seems necessary—indeed, the more respectable publishers of comic books might reasonably welcome it—and I think one must accept Dr. Wertham's contention that no real problem of "freedom of expression" is involved, except that it may be difficult to frame a law that would not open the way to a wider censorship.

All this has taken me a long way from Paul, who doesn't carry a switch-blade knife and has so far been dissuaded even from subscribing to Charles Atlas' body-building course. Paul only clutches at his chest now and then, says something like "arrgh," and drops dead; and he no longer does that very often. Perhaps even Dr. Wertham would not be greatly alarmed about Paul. But I would not say that Paul is not involved in the problem at all. Even if he "needs" *Superman*, I would prefer that he didn't read it. And what he does read is not even *Superman*, which is too juvenile for him; he reads some of the liveliest, bloodiest, and worst material that the "ruthless" comic-book industry has to offer—he is an EC Fan-Addict.

I think my position is that I would be happy if Senator Kefauver and Dr. Wertham could find some way to make it impossible for Paul to get *any* comic books. But I'd rather Paul didn't get the idea that I had anything to do with it.

AN AFTERWORD

Paul Warshow recalls that shortly after "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham" appeared in 1954, he and his father went to the mailbox together one morning and found a letter from Dr. Wertham. The letter was addressed to Paul but was obviously intended for his father's eyes. It said something to the effect of, "Someday when you're older you'll realize that your father has written the best article about comics ever to appear." The senior Warshow responded to Wertham, expressing surprise at the friendly tone of the letter.

Dr. Wertham's judgment in this one case is still correct after all these years. At the time Warshow's essay appeared, every magazine from The Saturday Review *to* The Reader's Digest *had run at least one article on the comic book menace. Most*

* An advertisement on the back cover of recent issues of *Panic* and *Weird Science-Fantasy* strikes a loftier note: "BOYS, GIRLS, MEN, WOMEN! The World Is On Fire. Serve The LORD and You Can Have These PRIZES! We will send you the wonderful prizes pictured on this page . . . all WITHOUT ONE PENNY OF COST. Crime, sin, graft, wars are the greatest they have ever been. Our leaders say a reawakening of Christianity is needed to save us. You can do your share by spreading the gospel into every house in your community. Merely show your friends and neighbors inspiring, beautiful Religious Wall Motto plaques. Many buy six or more . . . only 35c . . . sell on sight. . . . Serve the LORD and earn prizes you want."

of these articles were shrill, hysterical and aggressively inaccurate (a prime example of the latter being T.E. Murphy's characterization of gags in Mad *and the* Mad*-imitation* Riot *as straight-out horror and crime scenes).*

Warshow obviously had nothing in common with these commercial crusaders. His concern was to come as close as he could to the truth about his subject, and his article makes a number of perceptive and acute observations—perhaps the most telling ones being in his extended discussion of Wertham's moral confusion when dealing with the comic industry's motives. Warshow's evenhanded approach leads to the interesting observation, made even while condemning the horror comics, that they are "livelier and more imaginative" than the institutionally mass produced DC titles. His discovery that a child's interest in how comics are produced helps protect him from the material is also interesting—though the important clue of Paul recognizing Johnny Craig from a drawing that appeared in one of the comics should have tipped off Warshow to the fact that EC was an active participant in this process.

Especially good are Warshow's frank character studies of himself and his son. His willingness to admit to finding some merit in the comics—to having read Mad *"with a kind of irritated pleasure," for example—is an essential part of the essay and well illustrates Lionel Trilling's statement, "The principle by which Warshow worked was never to separate himself from the matter at hand, always to implicate himself in it."*

Warshow's reluctant defense of comics as a "sinful" world which children need in order to "retreat from the demands of the adult world," interestingly prefigures Jules Feiffer's very same point over ten years later in The Great Comic Book Heroes *("A child, simply to save his sanity, must go underground. Have a place to hide where he cannot be got at by grownups.")*

Finally, though Warshow expresses concern with the gruesomeness of the horror comics (one can imagine Paul being thankful that his father hadn't discovered that "Foul Play" was an EC story), he alone of all the critics of comics points out another—and for me a more disturbing—aspect of many comics, including ECs: their emphasis on "the inexorable logic of personal interest," "the comic book conception of human nature which sees everyone as a potential criminal and every criminal as an absolute criminal."

The openmindedness and thoroughness that characterize this essay are also to be found in Robert Warshow's other critical essays on the popular arts (mostly movies) that are collected in his The Immediate Experience. *Currently available in paperback from Atheneum, it has remained in print since it was published twenty years ago. The rest of the book fully measures up to "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham" and is highly recommended. Sadly, the book represents the majority of Warshow's critical output; he died of a heart attack at the age of 37 in 1955.*

As one might guess from the essay's description of his shifting interests, Paul lost interest in EC shortly after "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham" was written, though not before having a letter published in Crime SuspenStories *# 25. Like many others, he put his ECs away, insisting that they be saved, and didn't think much about them until, again like many others, he went to pull them out a few years back with the idea of selling them, and found that many of them had been thrown out.*

He has no interest in reading ECs today, although, he says, "I'm still interested in the time that I was interested in them." When looking through his ECs prior to selling them, Paul—now older than his father was when "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham" was written—was struck by what he called the "very shallow cynicism" of the horror and crime stories. And although he was pleased to find in Mad*—which had been his favorite and the title that had initially interested him in EC—the cleverness and invention that he'd remembered, he was surprised and disappointed to find this same kind of violence and cynicism pervading* Mad *as well. Essentially, it seems, he found himself in agreement with his father's assessment.*

Paul's observation is that a child somehow doesn't mind the cynicism in the way that an adult does. He says, "The adult is upset that the world of the comic books is such a false and offensive version of real life. The child doesn't care about the relationship of the comic book world and real life, i.e. the adult world. He has still acquired relatively little knowledge of this 'real life,' or perhaps one might better say, he still has not joined the adult world. And he's just as happy to postpone a little longer the acquiring of this knowledge. He asks of the comics only that they be interesting and exciting, without regard to this adult sort of 'truth.' Thus the possibility of 'offensiveness' doesn't exist for him. And what I've said about children is likewise true for those adults (or one part of them) who can still read comics with the wholeheartedness of children."

Paul Warshow has taught film and has published articles, mainly on film, for Film Quarterly *and other magazines.*

—John Benson

IN MEMORIAM

ROY G. KRENKEL

About a week before the pages of this issue were locked in, Roy Krenkel died. His death, from cancer, was not unexpected, but it took us by surprise anyhow. Roy was so completely alive--there's no other word for it. He could make anything he happened to be talking about sound absolutely fascinating. Often the subject would be drawing, or collecting the work of great illustrators--two of Roy's passions. His temperament didn't lead him in the direction of creating large finished works--he only did a few complete comic book stories and not that many finished paintings. But he sketched constantly, and to go through stacks of Krenkel sketches is to marvel at his imagination and technique. Most of them have never been published, though plans are afoot to rectify this. One published collection, Cities and Scenes from the Ancient World from Owlswick Press, is especially interesting because of Krenkel's very lucid introduction about an artist's creative process.

He influenced many fantasy artists who are better known than he is, not only by example, but through discussion and by exposing them to his large collection of American and European illustration of the past 100 years. Roy is still probably best known as the creator of the fantastic cities in Al Williamson's EC stories. Hopefully he'll be better known in the coming years for his other outstanding work.

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

SQUA TRONT 3 (1969). 80 page issue. Color covers by Feldstein and Crandall. The EC science-fiction comics. Features on Frazetta, Crandall and Evans, with unpublished newspaper strips. $5.00.

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